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English Men of Letters

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



*By the Same Author*

THOMAS MOORE (*E.M.L. Series*)

THE MASTERS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

THE LIFE OF MARY KINGSLEY

FOND OPINIONS

\*

COLLECTED POEMS

# ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

BY

STEPHEN GWYNN

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
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TO  
A. L. IRVINE  
WITH GRATITUDE  
FOR THE SUGGESTION  
WHICH LAUNCHED THIS BOOK  
AND  
FOR MUCH OTHER HELP  
AND ENCOURAGEMENT



## PREFACE

THIS book is a biography only in so far as it follows out facts and events which influenced or determined the special development of Stevenson's literary gift, and of his contemporary fame. It has been written from a standpoint more personal than is usually adopted in this series, because the writer belongs in point of time to the generation which was specially affected by Stevenson's example and precepts; and readers should be aware of the advantages and disadvantages which may attend such a commentator.

Thanks are due to Mr. Lloyd Osbourne for permission to illustrate freely by quotation from Stevenson's works—including of course those of which Mr. Osbourne is jointly the author.

S. G.



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## CHAPTER I

### THE INDUSTRIOUS TRUANT

EVERY man, if he has the gift and the inclination, is the best person to inform us about his own life and work. Stevenson had both the will and the power in such measure, he is so admirably autobiographic, that we know more of him than of almost any other writer—more indeed than of almost any man now dead in any time or trade. His cousin, Graham Balfour, in compiling the authorised biography was able to set out almost by a cento of quotations from Stevenson's own words a life-story, most romantic and engaging, complex in its vicissitudes. But the biographer had enough to do with showing us the man, what he was born to, what he became, what he did, what happened to him, and how he bore himself in struggle and in success; it remains to trace the development of the writer, consciously and deliberately an artist, to a degree that has been rare among the English. And here again the subject of study offers us lavishly his own guidance. Stevenson talked to the world, as a man might talk to his friend, about himself, his adventures, his happinesses and his hardships; and the world gave him its affection. But he talked to other writers, as an artist might talk to painters in his own

studio, showing the finished work and the unfinished, discoursing on the difficulties, the mechanism and the contrivances of his craft; preaching always, for he was by nature a preacher, the necessity of laborious effort. He never spoke as from the top of achievement; he never concealed from us how far all that he had accomplished fell behind what he hoped to do; he made us share his disappointment no less than his aspiration, as if we were all in the same fight. So long as he lived, many who followed the craft watched for his next publication with a tension of interest that is difficult for a later generation to realise; and since, for the purpose of this present study, what I thought and felt about him while he was living has no less value than my present judgment, I may quote, to illustrate that interest, some lines of what I wrote in the *Fortnightly Review* of December 1894:

The collected edition of Mr. Stevenson's writings which is in process of publication makes what one may call the author's formal diploma of renown; so far as contemporary opinion can affirm, he proceeds a classic. It is a verdict which I, for one, would never challenge; Mr. Stevenson belongs to that class of writers who have possessed, over and above their own gifts, the peculiar power of enlisting our affections. Whenever a new volume of his has appeared, the pathetic preface to *Prince Otto* has never failed to run in my head. "Well, we will not give in that we are beaten; I still mean to get my health again; I still purpose, this book or the next, to launch a masterpiece."

That his purpose has been accomplished, few would deny; these volumes will contain, not one masterpiece but several in different kinds. Yet—and the cry is loudest when Mr. Stevenson's admirers are most devoted—we thought he might have done something more.

Any other man, almost, among the rank and file of

us who were then young writers would have understood the feeling with which I wrote that article, the pleasure in laying a small wreath at the feet of a master. But ten days after it appeared, there was flashed under the ocean news of Stevenson's sudden and unlooked-for death; and "Q" (now Professor Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch), one of those who had learnt most successfully from his example, spoke what must have been the feeling of hundreds:

Stevenson is dead and now there is nobody left to write for. Our children and grandchildren shall rejoice in his books but we of the living generation possessed in the living man something that they will not know. So long as he lived, though it were far from us—though we had never spoken to him and he perhaps had barely heard our names—we always wrote our best for Stevenson. While he lived, he moved men to put their utmost even into writings that quite certainly would never meet his eye.

In short, Stevenson was, for those who were writing or beginning to write in the last quarter of last century, accepted as the captain of their company. This is not to say that he was rated along with Meredith (his own acknowledged master in some efforts) or with Hardy's sombre genius. These men offered the example of their work, but they worked in isolation—Hardy, almost deliberately aloof and cut off. Stevenson stood in a different relation, in part because of the very imperfection in his achievement which he so frankly avowed, yet chiefly because he was not content to be an artist, but must preach a gospel of artistic endeavour.

Perhaps what lay deepest in him was an instinctive desire to affect the conduct of others. Henley's well-known phrase added for the final ingredient in his oddly assorted nature "something of the Shorter-

Catechist"; but, at least to the uncatechised, this implies a bent towards theological disputation. Disputatious Stevenson certainly was, but not on dogma; there was never a more practical moralist, and the main application of his preaching and teaching concerned the work to which his vocation had led him. Whoever preaches declares his craving for disciples; Stevenson found them, but only after he himself had been for a long time at school.

The first thing to do is to trace the formation of this conscious, deliberate and determined artist. He counts among the writers who endear themselves because they had to fight a hard battle, yet the obstacles in his path were not of the usual kind. The son of a prosperous and distinguished man, the only child of parents whom he loved and who were wrapped up in him, neither poverty nor lack of sympathy hampered his development. Physical weakness was a grave handicap, and from childhood to maturity germs of disease were eating at his vitals; desperate energy was often needed to spur on his flagging body. Yet the essential trouble lay deeper. He was surrounded by too many and too intimate solitudes; he had to trample his way to freedom over the tenderest affections and the most devout beliefs. He could not, as his parents had hoped, continue the pattern of their lives; and yet he was proud to the core of his being of the work which his father had done, and that father's father before him. But it was not the work, or the way, to which an urgent vocation called him.

The person who most affected his early life was certainly his father—in all ways a remarkable man.

Thomas Stevenson was one of three sons, who succeeded their father Robert Stevenson as consulting engineers to the Northern Board of Lights. The dangerous Scottish coast was ringed about with towers and beacons erected by them in defiance of wild wind and wild water, some of them prodigies of audacious enterprise and skill; the fame of their firm had gone out to the ends of the world; they were consulting engineers to New Zealand and even to Japan. The work that they did was in part scientific, carried out in Edinburgh, but in part it was rough, hard, and dangerous, a grapple with the forces of storm on outlying spurs and pinnacles of rock where not even the seal or the seagull could always rest. Hardly even the seaman's trade or the soldier's could make a stronger appeal to imagination.

Thomas Stevenson had, like his brother, full part in all the business of erecting harbour works, river dams and the like, but he was more specially distinguished as an inventor and perfecter of illuminating apparatus—highly scientific work. Yet it would seem that not only he but all his family were guided less by scientific knowledge than by a faculty comparable to the artist's—an instinct for dealing with the concrete problems that presented themselves. Thomas Stevenson had to rely on his friends for assistance (we are told by his son) in the abstruse mathematical calculations required for his work. There went with this in him such a contempt for the academic stamp that, one may say, he let his boy educate himself as best he could. In a country where schooling was valued by rich and by poor, and where excellent teaching was to be had, this prosperous man's son drifted from one teacher to

another, at haphazard. It is curious to know that one specially gifted instructor of youth, D'Arcy Thompson, in whose class he made a brief appearance, remembered him without amenity as a grubby and unpleasing little boy. The type of which he was an example is one which gains exceedingly by growing up; and even in college days we have Stevenson's own word for it that he was an unpopular student, as well as an idle one. At all events, not the least pressure was ever put on Louis Stevenson to mind his work at school or at college. Nobody could have had a less formal intellectual training, and since he was a born truant, though a willing learner of whatever caught his fancy, this dispensation was entirely to his liking. Probably, for making him what he soon wanted to be, and in time became, nothing better could have been devised.

Yet it was the result of circumstances. Mrs. Stevenson was delicate; Louis Stevenson inherited his chest troubles from her; and as a child, he passed from one illness to another. The family home was in Edinburgh, but repeated changes, for the mother's health or the boy's, interrupted schooling; so that Louis, as his home called him, grew up mainly in the company of his father, his mother and a devoted nurse, Alison Cunningham.

Thomas Stevenson, though little concerned to know how his boy got on at school, was too shrewd a man not to be certain that ability was there; he believed in self-education, and he knew at least that the passion for reading had shown itself. Not that Louis began specially early to devour books; but his mother and his nurse read to him perpetually, since he could not be outdoors playing: and it was the

nurse who infected his mind with her own delight in words. She thought plays an invention of the devil, but her declamation was dramatic—"reading the works of others as a poet would scarcely dare to read his own: gloating on the rhythm, dwelling with delight on the assonances and alliterations". So her nursling phrased it, when he recalled a childhood of which his memory was unusually vivid. Alison Cunningham had no idea what assonance or alliteration meant, but she recited the hymns and the metrical versions of the psalms till verses of them stayed in his ears for ever; and she read selections from Presbyterian sermons, and above all, stories of the Covenanters and how they suffered for their faith. When in *Kidnapped* and *Catriona* and *The Master of Ballantrae* Stevenson had to recount dramatic happenings through the imagined person of a serious-minded Scot, the speech which he chose, the words and the turn of phrase, the whole idiom of the mind, took colour from those far off readings. His ear was attuned from the first to the solemn and long-drawn cadences of seventeenth-century Scottish prose.

He has told us also how he played at being a pirate or a hunter, and how this passion for romance fed itself ardently through the pictured scenes of Skelt's Toy Theatre. If the pictures were not very good, imagination could mend them, in figuring the scenes of "Wreck Ashore", or "Sixteen-fingered Jack". All these planted a seed which germinated later to good purpose. Something was gained for the writer by being shut indoors when other youngsters were abroad with catapults or cricket bats. Even when he grew well enough to move freely out of doors, these studies



left their mark. Passion for romance expressed itself in a loaded cudgel, acquired when he was fourteen ; and his essay on *The Lantern Bearers* gives us another insight into the ways in which a vivid fancy built up romantic adventures like a house of cards.

If the body was frail, the spirit was enterprising ; Stevenson had as much of Tom Sawyer in him as any boy that ever lived, and, boy or man, whenever his body would let him, he must be up and about, doing something actively, and doing it as if it were an adventure.

It would be completely wrong to say that his was a lonely childhood. The figure of his mother remains indistinct, but from birth to death she never lost touch with him. Alison Cunningham, the nurse, was fine company, that is evident, but there was also his father, by no means remote. Thomas Stevenson was a great original ; beloved in Edinburgh " where he breathed an air that pleased him " (so his son wrote), and even outside of his own city, attaching acquaintances by his " strange humorous vein of talk ". Like son, like father ; neither man could hold to one beaten track ; and over and above his work as an engineer, and his quite distinct preoccupations as a designer of elaborate apparatus, Thomas Stevenson must adventure in amateur theology, and write treatises on the evidences for Christianity. His library (" a spot of some austerity ") was packed with volumes of scientific proceedings and tomes of theology ; but " he had two books, *Guy Mannering* and *The Parent's Assistant*, of which he never wearied ". Louis Stevenson never inherited the taste for Miss Edgeworth, but this, as readers of Lockhart know, was easily related to the taste for Scott ; and Thomas Stevenson, born in

1825, had grown up in the atmosphere of Sir Walter. His father (Stevenson the First, one may say) had accompanied Scott on the yacht of the Northern Lights during his tour round the Orkneys and Shetland; Sir Walter was a living memory wherever any of Robert Stevenson's children inhabited; and in that unprepossessing library Louis Stevenson got hold of his first Waverley—*Rob Roy*.

Still, between the father and son there cannot have been anything to call companionship for a good many years; but companions of his own age were plenty. Even in a clannish country, they were a numerous clan, with fifty first-cousins, most of them being Balfours, of his mother's side. Apparently he was popular among them, and made much of because he was an invalid; but one thing is clear; he was somehow a good deal older than his age. For from the time when he was ten, one of his closest alliances began to form itself with his cousin Bob—Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson—by four years his elder. Few things are less likely than that a boy of fourteen will make a companion of a ten-year-old; yet even then these two had minds that delighted in each other, and they played together as equals.

There must have been some odd strain in the composition of this remarkable family. All Robert Stevenson's three sons followed their father's profession as a matter of natural instinct; all three of them could hardly imagine that a Stevenson should want to be anything other than a member of the famous firm; yet out of the three, only one saw the fine inheritance transmitted. The other two, each with his hopes pinned to an only son, found that only son

incorrigibly straying off into the vagrant career of artistry. "Bob" Stevenson, as his cousin and all the world called him, began as a painter, then drifted into letters; but Louis knew his way from the first. One of those who was his schoolfellow during some of his intermittent periods of school attendance says that at thirteen he had already determined to be a writer. This might be put down as another form of boyish romancing, were it not that he himself has told us, when his fame was fully established, how serious that resolve was. In the essay, *A College Magazine* (published among *Memories and Portraits* in 1887), he opens with this passage, which no biography of him can leave unquoted:

All through my boyhood and youth, I was known and pointed out for the pattern of an idler; and yet I was always busy on my own private end, which was to learn to write. I kept always two books in my pocket, one to read, one to write in. As I walked, my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words; when I sat by the roadside, I would either read, or a pencil and a penny version-book would be in my hand, to note down the features of the scene or commemorate some halting stanzas. Thus I lived with words. And what I thus wrote was for no ulterior use, it was written consciously for practice. It was not so much that I wished to be an author (though I wished that too) as that I had vowed that I would learn to write. That was a proficiency that tempted me; and I practised to acquire it, as men learn to whittle, in a wager with myself. Description was the principal field of my exercise; for to anyone with senses there is always something worth describing, and town and country are but one continuous subject. But I worked in other ways also; often accompanied my walks with dramatic dialogues, in which I played many parts; and often exercised myself in writing down conversations from memory. . . .

Whenever I read a book or a passage that particularly pleased me, in which a thing was said or an effect rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, and I knew it; and tried again, and was again unsuccessful and always unsuccessful; but at least in these vain bouts, I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony, in construction and the co-ordination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire and to Obermann.

Details of his experimenting follow, one of which is curious. "Even at the age of thirteen, I had tried to do justice to the inhabitants of the famous city of Peebles in the style of the *Book of Snobs*." In his father's library, amongst the few things "really legible", which "existed as if by accident", there were included four old volumes of *Punch*. "In these latter", he says (in *Rosa quo locorum*), "I very early fell in love (almost as soon as I could spell) with the 'Snob Papers'". So, apparently, as soon as he could attempt writing, he was imitating Thackeray. But soon, as his reading extended (and it ranged wide) he was for bolder adventures, "walking in the footsteps of Robert Browning, with *Cain, an Epic in Imitation of 'Sordello'*"; of Mr. Swinburne with *Monmouth, a Tragedy*, and of John Webster in *The King's Pardon, a Tragedy*".

All this process of experimenting, which made Stevenson's real education, continued long past schoolboy days; but it began early in them, and before he was sixteen he had made a first appearance in print. The Pentland Rising of 1666 had attracted

his attention, partly because Alison Cunningham had inspired him with a zeal for all that concerned the Covenanters ; partly because this abortive revolt of a few hundred West Country Whigamores, who captured Dumfries and then marched on Edinburgh, came to its bloody defeat on ground which he knew well. The final encounter was at Rullion Green on a spur of the Pentlands ; but on the night before it, the insurgents camped at Colinton, four miles south-west of the city. Louis Stevenson had spent many happy days in the manse of his mother's father who was minister of Colinton ; and for the love of Colinton and of the Covenanters, he attempted a novel whose plot turned upon events of the rising. It was shown to Mr. Stevenson, who observed that the mixture of fiction had spoilt a fine story ; and its author tried his hand again at straight-forward historical narrative. This was published anonymously as a pamphlet by an Edinburgh bookseller, so presumably Mr. Stevenson approved the work in its new form. But he very soon bought in all the copies that he could get hold of ; a few escaped, to be scrambled for later at fancy prices by collectors. It should be understood that the publication was commemorative, being dated Edinburgh, November 28th, 1866—two hundred years from the day when the little band was destroyed at Rullion Green. The account of the rising, and of the provocations which led to it, is written with strong bias to the Covenanting side ; but serious historical study had gone to the work, and Sir James Turner, the leader of the "persecutors", is treated with some indulgence because a sense of humour in his *Memoirs* had appealed to the student. Further, the story of

the fight in which Dalzell's troops were three times repulsed before they broke the resistance is so told that all stages of it can be visualised. Toy soldiers had given Stevenson a game to play which continued to fascinate him like chess, and this is an early proof of his close interest in military affairs.

The actual writing opens with some dignity : " Two hundred years ago a tragedy was enacted in Scotland, the memory whereof has been in great measure lost or obscured by the deep tragedies which followed. It is, as it were, the evening of the night of persecution." Yet this quality of utterance is not maintained throughout, and there are some passages of a badness which would be astonishing if it were not a schoolboy's performance. Probably Stevenson's drastic power of self-criticism asserted itself when he saw his bantling on a bookstall, and he may have implored his father to pay for suppressing it.

The whole incident makes us perceive that Louis Stevenson and his parents lived in the happiest intimacy. He was always a sociable worker, eager to talk about what he was doing, anxious for criticism. Though he might have said with Swift that he " had written and burnt, and written and burnt again, more than perhaps any man in England ", yet when a piece of work seemed to him worth keeping, he must show it to whoever was at hand, and even when he was alone must send it to be looked at. So he continued to the end of his days. Yet it is not every father to whom a boy of fifteen will bring his attempts at writing ; relations must be very easy when that can happen.

What Mr. Stevenson thought of all this preparation for literary work can only be guessed at, but he plainly

did nothing to discourage it. Probably it was never seriously present to his mind that his son, with an honourable and useful career ready for him to step into, would think of anything so preposterous as to make writing his life's occupation. He may very possibly have remembered Scott's saying that "literature is a good staff but a bad crutch", and been willing enough that Louis should occupy his leisure with history or even fiction just as he himself found time to produce works on the Foundations of Belief without prejudice to his efficiency. In truth it was difficult for any of Robert Stevenson's three sons to believe that any Stevenson of their line could wish to be anything but what Robert Stevenson had been, and they were; men of science in some measure, yet, as Graham Balfour puts it, "chiefly marked by a sort of instinct for dealing with the forces of nature, seldom manifested clearly till called forth in actual practice".

When Thomas Stevenson approved the publication of his son's pamphlet, it was already time to expect some indication of the hereditary bent. Changes of climate had proved a good medicine; in 1864 Louis and his mother spent the months from January to May in Mentone; a later stay in Torquay confirmed the improvement, and from 1866 both were so far established in health that they could live in Scotland. But there was one result ominous for Mr. Stevenson's projects; Louis had fallen in love with the Mediterranean shores; and from that time forward, no matter how many ties held him to his own country in Scotland, he felt himself always an exile from the sun. He hated cold and wet and wind; yet the career for which he was designed must be followed in a cold, wet, and very

windy city, with intermitting periods spent on wet and windy shores.

Mr. Stevenson gave his offspring a smell of the business early: when the boy was only thirteen, father and son visited seventeen lights on the Fife coast in one day, and later there were many more such excursions at intervals in the irregular courses of schooling and holidays. But the expected response did not come; the hoped for natural bent would not develop. Louis Stevenson was a delighted observer of whatever his eyes could show him; but while he would be watching the play of light over an expanse of sea, or the endlessly varying sameness of a river's moving body, his father would be trying to compute the height of waves and the weight of their impact, or asking himself what practical results would follow if a groin thrust in here or there should give a new direction to the current. Where Nature offered to the father raw material for the art of an engineer, the son was consciously and subconsciously preparing to fill penny copy-books. "Can you not use the eyes that God has given you?" the father would say, pointing out where a piece of land could be won for cultivation by changing the flow of water. Certainly he could use them, though not to his father's purpose. Both the eye to see, and the mind that should utilise its vision, were early in training—but for the work of an artist.

At the age of seventeen he entered Edinburgh University, which would have meant to most young men the regular preparation for a profession. But regularity, to put it moderately, had no charm for Louis Stevenson; he was no more a willing learner at college than he had been at school; and his father's



indifference to all evidence of academic progress continued to be complete. With all the ingenuity that he could muster, the young man avoided lectures ; indeed Barrie in *An Edinburgh Eleven* says that he was never really part of the university and was in this way, as in others, only sentimentally a Scotchman. That is a shallow criticism. Beyond yea or nay, Louis Stevenson was part of the student life of Edinburgh ; he shared fully the vital part of university education, which is the education of the young by the young. He was now less shut into the home circle ; he talked perhaps more than at any other period of his life ; he freely exchanged ideas with other clever young men whose minds, like his own, were in the making. And if he idled deliberately, it was not without observing the fact that many of his fellow students could not afford to idle, because only by a fierce self-denial, both in themselves and in their parents, they could get the chance to learn. Free contact with life impressed upon him sharply the sense of life's inequalities, and he did not accept them complacently. Many moralists would have told him that it was his duty to make the most of opportunities with which he had been bountifully provided ; but that would have seemed to him a mere profiting by the unfair handicap. Every month, as he saw it, left him more in debt to the world ; and it became in his mind a matter not of honour but of simple honesty to repay. Only, he had already his own notion—which all about him would have scouted as romantically absurd—of the way in which the debt could be discharged. He took his prospects of doing something for the world very seriously at this time—much more seriously, indeed, than when he had done it.

Along with the university discipline, or indiscipline, there went preparation for the tasks of an engineer. He was despatched in vacation time by his father to observe and take a hand in harbour works which the firm were carrying out at Anstruther on the Fife coast, and at Wick in the bleakest north. A whole sheaf of letters to his mother (the one person to whom he wrote regularly all his life) gives a vivid notion of what he was like in his eighteenth year ; but it matters more for the present purpose that they show what had come out of the penny copy-books. Fife with its "bleak fertility" had no interest for him ; but he came on a miserable company of strolling players, performing to a total receipt of five and threepence. The manager had to sing a comic song, which "came grimly from his throat"; Stevenson thought "that manager had a soul above comic songs"; and when his companion commented that the fellow would be much happier as a common working-man, "I told him", he wrote to his mother, "I thought he would be less happy earning a comfortable living as a shoemaker than he would starving as an actor with such artistic work as he had to do". This was dangerous doctrine, if Mr. Thomas Stevenson had weighed it, to come from one designed for a sober profession. However, he wrote also, for his father's eye, technical details about the work in progress ; but no literary effort was expended on these.

From Wick came at first more bald technicalities—mixed up with indignation against a Free Church minister who "told me point blank that all Roman Catholics would be damned". But very soon he began to look about him.

Certainly Wick in itself possesses no beauty : bare, grey shores, grim grey houses, grim grey seas ; not even the gleam of red tiles ; not even the greenness of a tree. The southerly heights, when I came here, were black with people, fishers waiting on wind and night. Now all the S.Y.S. (Stornaway boats) have beaten out of the bay, and the Wick men stay indoors or wrangle on the quays with dissatisfied fish-curers, knee-high in brine, mud, and herring refuse. The day when the boats put out to go home to the Hebrides, the girl here told me there was " a black wind " ; and on going out, I found the epithet as justifiable as it was picturesque. A cold, *black* southerly wind, with occasional rising showers of rain ; it was a fine sight to see the boats beat out a-teeth of it. . . .

To the south, however, is as fine a piece of coast scenery as I ever saw. Great black chasms, huge black cliffs, rugged and over-hung gullies, natural arches, and deep green pools below them, almost too deep to let you see the gleam of sand among the darker weed : there are deep caves too. In one of these lives a tribe of gipsies. The men are *always* drunk, simply and truthfully always. From morning to evening the great villainous-looking fellows are either sleeping off the last debauch, or hulking about the cove " in the horrors ".

Eighteen-year-old could give swift rendering in words of a visual impression, with the accompanying human interest ; there is action in the picture.

Then come other letters, which, taken together, show us the mind in training : thanks for books received—Virgil's *Bucolics*, Aikman's *Annals of the Persecutions in Scotland* (" a precious and most acceptable donation"), Wilkie Collins's *Moonstone* and George Herbert's poetry : and on the other hand, description of rough work, eight hours a day out in an open boat, pulling on a hawser in the endeavour to get a gauge-pole erected. It left him none the worse except for " hands skinned, blistered, discoloured and engrained with tar,

a slight crick in the neck from the rain running down, and general stiffness from pulling, hauling and tugging for dear life". Then a storm provided excitement; he saw a Norwegian vessel go ashore, and watched while the sea played the mischief with Mr. Stevenson's new pier :

The thunder at the wall when it first struck—the rush along ever growing higher—the great jet of snow-white spray some forty feet above you—and the "noise of many waters", the roar, the hiss, the "shrieking" among the shingle as it fell head over heels at your feet. I watched if it threw the big stones at the wall; but it never moved them.

*Monday.*—The end of the work displays gaps, cairns of ten-ton blocks, stones torn from their places and turned right round. The damage above water is comparatively little: what there may be below, *on ne sait pas encore*. The roadway is torn away, crossheads, broken planks tossed here and there, planks gnawn and mumbled as if a starved bear had been trying to eat them, planks with spalls lifted from them as if they had been dressed with a rugged plane, one pile swaying to and fro clear of the bottom, the rails in one place sunk a foot at least. This was not a great storm, the waves were light and short. Yet when we were standing at the office, I felt the ground beneath me *quail* as a huge roller thundered on the work at the last year's cross wall.

He knew perfectly well, and the next sentence shows it, that an apprentice engineer ought not to be contemplating a storm at Wick with appreciation. "I can't look at it practically however: that will come, I suppose, like grey hair or coffin nails."

The same sentence conveys that "Mr. Thomas Stevenson, C.E.," repudiated furiously all touch of the artistic temperament, and that his son delighted to impute it to him. We may guess what Mr. Stevenson

would have said, had he known, as we know now, that all spare time, which should have gone to thought about the professional lessons to be drawn from each day's experiences, was taken up with attempts at poetry or novel writing. It was in this summer that hatred of suffering forced Stevenson to put out his candle, to which moths crowded, although darkness must check his progress with *Voces Fidelium*—the projected masterpiece at which he was toiling and by which, no doubt, he hoped to pay his debts to the world. The decision was taken in anguish, as it seemed to him, "under the imminent dart of death"; but the moths were saved; and what is even more creditable, *Voces Fidelium* was torn up, like a score of other failures, when its inadequacy was recognised. Hardly any one else was ever so young—so vivid in eagerness, so full of youth's gallant absurdities.

The most significant description of him at this stage in his development comes from a woman, Mrs. Fleeming Jenkin, wife of the professor of engineering. She had come to call on Mrs. Stevenson in the winter of 1868 and found her sitting in the firelight apparently alone; they began to talk, when suddenly from out of a dark corner "came a voice, peculiar, vibrating"; a boy's voice, she thought, at first. It went on, and she began to wonder "who was this young Heine with the Scotch accent, who talked as Charles Lamb wrote". As he saw her to the door, she asked him to come and see them, and went home to tell her husband she had made the acquaintance of a poet. He came next day and constantly afterwards; Fleeming Jenkin was probably the only one of his professors who meant much to Stevenson; but how

much he meant has been recorded with grateful eloquence.

His talk attracted attention everywhere, and on the strength of this reputation, the undistinguished student was elected in his second academic year to the Speculative Society, whose membership is limited to thirty. This institution, of which Scott and Jeffrey had in their time been members, provided a clubroom, and held meetings once a week, at which essays were read and criticised and debates held. Stevenson attended them with growing regularity during the four years of his membership. Two of the closest among his friends were also members of it, Charles Baxter and James Walter Ferrier, and Ferrier with Stevenson and two others embarked in a literary venture. They brought out an "Edinburgh University Magazine" which enjoyed the dignity of print during a career of four monthly appearances. When it "sickened and subsided into night", Stevenson, though he had done most of the writing, was neither surprised nor dismayed; told himself that "the time was not yet ripe nor the man ready", and so fell to work once more on his penny copy-books.

During the long vacations of 1869 and 1870 he was again sent out to make contact with the business of the firm,—hanging about harbour sides ("which is the richest form of idling"), visiting wild islets, and getting some "taste of the genial dangers of the sea". In this way he saw the coasts of Orkney and Shetland, and spent three weeks on the little island of Earraid, which was to figure later in *The Merry Men* and in *Kidnapped*. That is to say, he added to a very considerable study of Scotch history a knowledge of far-

out corners of the Highlands and islands, enriching his experience and his vocabulary. All this was useful to the man of letters; everything was food to his mind that his mind enjoyed. But he saw enough in these years to understand that a man in his father's way of life must "pass from the roaring skerry and wet thwart of the rowboat to the stool and the desk"; must "balance one part of genuine life against two parts of drudgery between four walls". This he could not face. In the task to which his own vocation led him, no labour was too great or application too constant to daunt him; but drudgery, simply to make a living, he could not stomach; and in the spring of 1871, he formally asked his father to consent that he should give up engineering for literature as a profession.

This request was only made after he had given considerable proof of aptitude by a paper on *A New Form of Intermittent Light*, which he read before the Royal Scottish Society of Arts; it was honoured with a premium and publication in the Society's *Proceedings*. One may fairly suppose that he had been at pains to prove that idleness was not the reason for what must have sounded like a desertion.

We are told in the Introduction to his early *Letters* that his health had proved unequal to the physical work needed for marine engineering. I doubt if he himself used this argument, though it may have weighed with his father. After his death, his widow wrote that, if health had permitted, he would certainly have been a soldier. Health apart, it is difficult to imagine a man less suited than Stevenson to the life of the British army in peace time; there certainly routine

would have irked him. Graham Balfour admits that in later life he was disposed to wish at times that he had been a man of action, but accepts the fact, which indeed is made clear by all his letters, that in youth one desire was paramount with him—to achieve success in the art of writing. “His impulse to letters was at this time overpowering and admitted of neither substitute nor rival.” Thoughts of a different career, if they did come later, were natural in one who had known a full measure of artistic achievement, and had realised how incomplete it looked beside the standard to which his youth had aspired.



## CHAPTER II

### FIRST STEPS IN LITERATURE

MR. STEVENSON had abandoned the hope that his son should enter the family firm ; but he had by no means consented to regard the pursuit of literature as an alternative profession. At that date, or indeed twenty years later, the average educated person barely believed it possible for a young man to earn an honest living simply with his pen. The thing had been done, but chances of success were counted fantastically remote. There was also a general impression that to be called to the bar was at least a good opening to life ; and Mr. Stevenson insisted that law should be taken up instead of engineering. Accordingly Louis Stevenson completed his university studies as a law student, no doubt learning something by the way. But the real business of life for him was still preparation to be a writer—though without any clear direction as yet to any particular kind of writing.

Manifestly there were in this half-formed youth, so idle and so industrious, faculties that sought an outlet through expression ; and the letters of this period help us better than any finished and published work to distinguish what these were. First among them was an extraordinary keenness of sensation. In 1872,

after a walk on a fine spring day, he wrote to Charles Baxter : " In such weather one has the bird's need to whistle. All the way along I was thanking God that he had made me and the birds and everything just as they are and not otherwise, for although there was no sun, the air was so thrilled with robins and blackbirds that it made the heart tremble with joy." There are a score of such passages, responses to every kind of stimulus ; he has the born vagabond's delight in change. " It is in these little flights of mine that I get more pleasure than in anything else. Now, at present, I am supremely uneasy and restless—almost to the extent of pain ; but O! how I enjoy it, and how I *shall* enjoy it afterwards (please God), if I get years enough allotted to me for the thing to ripen in. . . . What delightful things inns and waiters and bagmen are ! If we didn't travel now and then, we should forget what the feeling of life is." Always a part of the spectacle is himself ; he must enjoy the sight of himself enjoying. That is the mark of an essayist, and the essayist in him was the first literary character to emerge.

He had trained himself to keen appreciation of all effects in prose or verse, but a letter to one of his cousins gives us his response to art : " There is more latent life, more of the coiled spring of the sleeping dog, about a recumbent figure of Michael Angelo's than about the most excited of Greek statues. The very marble seems to wrinkle with a wild energy that we never feel except in dreams." One need not discuss the appraisement : the point is, that whatever he had seen he had seen intensely—and not least, the " coiled spring " in any sleeping dog.

But sensations roused by birdsong at morning, starshine at night, or by the works of art or poetry, could not be the only ones astir at one and twenty. Portraits of him show a boyish face with a very sensuous mouth. He had always an imaginative liking for the simplest fare—"bread I dip in the river"; but food and wine stirred his affections just as much as sight or scent or sound. Indeed he classes the two appeals together, saying that "it is as natural for a man to love a ship as to love Burgundy or a sunset".

Over and above all was the urgency of sex; young blood ran wild. He lived in a student atmosphere, largely pervaded by medical students, who are the least squeamish of student kind, and it seems agreed that he was not fastidious in his pleasures. We know at all events that he took them in doubtful company, partly because he had no choice. His parents grudged him nothing, except money to spend; till he was twenty-three, a pound a month was all they allowed him; and so, as he has told us himself, "I was the companion of seamen, chimney-sweeps and thieves; my circle was being continually changed by the action of the police magistrate. I see now the little sanded kitchen where Velvet Coat (for such was the name I went by) has spent days together, generally in silence and making some notes in a penny-version book. I was distinctly petted and respected; the women were most gentle and kind to me." To be plain, this establishment seems to have been one of the kind at which Villon in Paris and Fergusson in Edinburgh spent a deal of time, and what money they could command. Stevenson might very well have gone under as Fergusson did—whom he always regarded

as related to himself by a close affinity of nature ; and the strict morals of the home in which he was brought up would scarcely have stayed him. He probably got drunk at times, as Scott did, but that was not, for a man of his temperament, the worst danger ; and he was not, like Scott, protected by an early and romantic attachment. Yet he brought into the sanded kitchen, and out of it, a respectfulness towards women that may be a man's salvation ; and, here, I think his father's influence helped. Mr. Stevenson was a stout Tory " except ", his son adds, " in so far as his views were modified by a hot-headed chivalrous sentiment for women. He was actually in favour of a marriage law under which any woman might have a divorce for the asking, and no man on any ground whatever, and the same sentiment found another expression in a Magdalen mission in Edinburgh, founded and largely supported by himself."

Certainly Stevenson came to know, in these odd haunts, blackguards of every kind and the women with whom they associated ; and in his books he has drawn not only wastrels and ne'er-do-wells but the dangerous *apache*, such as Huish in *The Ebb Tide* ; yet I cannot recall in any of his books the study of a hateful woman. There is in the second volume of his *Letters* a page of advice to a young man in which this sentence occurs : " If you can make it convenient to be chaste, for God's sake, avoid the primness of your virtue ; hardness to a poor harlot is a sin lower than the ugliest unchastity ".

Perhaps the sanded kitchen had its uses for the novelist that was to be ; it widened his outlook on life. Nevertheless, this was a dangerous period for a young man with so much in him that was unsettled and

unsettling. Danger was worse, because in the very heat and ferment of his youth, violent disagreement arose between him and his father—as it seems, out of a blue sky. Mr. Stevenson put certain questions as to religious beliefs, which the son answered candidly. “If I had foreseen the real hell of everything since, I think I should have lied” he wrote to Charles Baxter. “What a pleasant thing it is to have just *damned* the happiness of (probably) the only two people who care a damn about you in the world.” That was in the beginning of 1873, his twenty-third year: and so long as he lived at home, the trouble flared up again and again. “My father and I can put about a year through in half an hour”, he writes. And in another letter: “I was sitting up here working when the door opened, and Bob came in with his hands over his face, and sank down on a chair and began to sob. . . . He had come to see me, had met my father on the way and had just brought to an end an interview with him. There is now, at least, one person in the world who knows what I have had to face, and what a tempest of emotions my father can raise when he is really excited.”

Fortunately, before the later of these passages was written (September of the same year) he had found what he most needed—a woman’s influence. Visiting one of his cousins in Suffolk, he met another guest there, Mrs. Sitwell, whom Londoners knew later as Lady Colvin. Sidney Colvin was already devoted to her, and she at once summoned him to become acquainted with her discovery. So began an intimacy which lasted till Stevenson’s death. Colvin, five years older than Stevenson, was the most cultured type of academic person, a Fellow of Trinity at Cam-

bridge ; he was at this time Slade Professor of the Fine Arts, but during most part of their long friendship he was Keeper of Prints at the British Museum, with a hospitable residence in what Stevenson always called " The Monument ". He had an admirable eagerness to foster literary talent ; he could be helpful with introductions to editors, and he put at Stevenson's command a scholarly intelligence, whose value may be judged from his book on Keats in this series—one of the best examples of English criticism. Now, on their first acquaintance, he could give encouragement with authority, and he gave it ; but at this pass in Stevenson's life, when there was nothing to show but failure, it was the woman who counted. She had her share of beauty ; she sang well, and he adored music ; her experience of the world was much wider than his ; so he worshipped her reverentially and poured out his heart in letters about all that he was doing, enjoying or suffering, all that he thought and that he saw.

An essay on *Roads*, planned while they were walking about in Suffolk, was the thing that occupied him in that September ; it was the first of his writings to be published and paid for. Colvin sent it to the *Saturday Review*, which refused it, and then to the *Portfolio*, where P. G. Hamerton printed what to-day looks rather a slackly-spun amateurish performance.

There are good things in it, of course ; for instance : " Every sensitive adjustment to the contour of the ground, every little dip and swerve, seems instinct with life and an exquisite sense of balance and beauty. The road rolls upon the easy slopes of the country, like a long ship in the hollow of the sea." But, in one word, there is too much of it ; the beginner has

not yet learned the chief of all lessons, what to leave out. The same is true of an earlier study (published posthumously in *Essays of Travel*) about Cockermouth and Keswick, where he went in 1871 on a tramping excursion. But in *Roads* we have only the essayist at his long-practised business of translating impressions gathered from a countryside: *Cockermouth and Keswick* is concerned chiefly with human types. Stevenson had a gift for picking up acquaintances which stood to him through his whole life's work. But for his faculty of giving himself in talk at such chance encounters, the little manufacturer of Canadian felt hats by the trout stream at Cockermouth would not have been tempted to tell him what special pleasure lay in the power to recall little and pleasant things; he would not have sent out his casual guest in a private raft on his mill dam in hope that he might thereby "manufacture a reminiscence" for this chance acquaintance's future enjoyment.

In this year 1873, which was critical in Stevenson's development, the very power of receiving sharp impressions seemed to be menaced. He might be killing his father, as he was told; but in that desperate wrestle between opposing loyalties, the younger man came near breaking. This became apparent when he went up to London, at the end of October, seeking admission to the English bar, which the Lord Advocate had recommended as a better field for him than the Scottish. In London Sir Andrew Clark saw him and insisted on a complete change of scene and climate; he was "Ordered South". The essay which bears that title in *Virginibus Puerisque* brings together thoughts first expressed in what he wrote from Mentone

to Mrs. Sitwell. After his first exultation in the "great living flood of sunshine" between his opened shutters (when the boots came in with hot water and found a young man dancing on the floor)—"hebetude" began to creep on him.

"I have lost the key. . . . Go South! Why, I saw more beauty with my eyes healthily alert to see in two wet windy February afternoons in Scotland than I can see in my beautiful olive gardens and grey hills in a whole week in my low and lost estate, as the Shorter Catechism puts it somewhere. . . . To sit by the sea and to be conscious of nothing but the sound of the waves, and the sunshine over all your body, is not unpleasant; but I was an Archangel once."

The driving force in any artist is a need to express his own vitality; that was what urged Stevenson to be a writer, long before he knew what exactly he was to write. When a man has found his way, and in some measure mastered his business, expression becomes a habit, and at the back of the habit is a sense of achievement; he has done this and that, his confidence that he can do more replaces his original need to utter himself, which no doubt is always there, but is never constant in its urgency. But at the beginning, when there is nothing to look back on, and no habit formed, failure of vitality cuts off what people call inspiration. Stevenson was gifted beyond most literary artists with a keenness of sensibility, his eyes and ears, every sense about him were alert to stimulate the shaping intelligence; on the other hand, more than most artists he was liable, through chronic recurrence of illness which lessened vitality, to find these messengers out of action. Later, he learnt to draw on memory,



and was supported by the knowledge that he had things to say that were worth saying and could say them acceptably; but now, even the desire for utterance languished, and lack of it was a pain.

Then, in his restless intelligence, scruples took hold. Even while at Edinburgh University he had "met other lads more diligent than himself who followed the plough in summer time to pay for their fees in winter"; a sense of the inequality in lots drove him to reflect upon his right, or unright, to spend money which his father had earned (as it seemed to him) by long sacrifice of liberty. Now, sent abroad, still at his father's expense, to profit by costly chances of recovery, the injustice seemed all the greater because he saw little hope of repaying by fruitful work what he regarded as a debt to humanity. The case is stated, abstractly, in *Lay Morals*, written five years later; but Mrs. Sitwell heard it now in detail. "I have received £80, some £55 of which remain; all this is more debt to civilisation and my fellowmen. When shall I be able to pay it back? . . . If I didn't hope to get well and do good work yet and more than repay my debts to the world, I should consider it right to invest an extra franc or two in laudanum. But I *will* repay it."

Not many artists have suffered from this particular torment, but Stevenson never escaped from it till he began to feel level with the world; and long years had to pass before he was in sight of what he could count solvency. Now, in 1873, the hope looked desperately remote. But Colvin came out to join him at Mentone and plans for various writing put some heart into the invalid: two Russian ladies and their attractive children made good company for this lover

of companionship ; *Ordered South* got finished, and accepted for *Macmillan's Magazine*, while he was still in France. It is the earliest piece of his writing that he republished, and, though at the time he thought *Roads* was the better written piece, it is a perfect example of his early and elaborate manner, where each sentence goes swinging and balancing itself like a dancer, in a series of concerted movements, leading at the end of the paragraph up to a harmonious close. Writing of this kind, he said to his secretary-step-daughter many years later, "should come off the tongue like honey" ; and he confessed to having had "a pretty talent that way".

Work at this time began on studies of Victor Hugo, of John Knox and of other subjects, which eventually took shape ; but there was no question of fiction. Development in him came first along the lines of the critical intelligence.

In April he left Mentone and went home, making a halt in Paris, where his cousin Bob was installed, as a would-be painter in the Latin quarter. At his home, when he reached Edinburgh, things went better ; he was confident enough in the future to accept an allowance of £80—regarding this as a justified advance for offers of work now began to come in. Morley asked him to review Lord Lytton's *Fables in Song* for the *Fortnightly* ; it was of more importance that Leslie Stephen accepted the article on *Victor Hugo's Romances* for *Cornhill*, with a letter of encouraging criticism. That year went by in Edinburgh with various excursions to London and elsewhere, against which his mother protested. But, he wrote to her, "I must be a bit of a vagabond ; it's your own fault

after all ; you shouldn't have had a tramp for a son ! " Meanwhile he was constantly pouring out letters to Mrs. Sitwell, about his sensations, his health (or hers), his work that was commissioned by magazines, and various novels which got partly written, and then wholly torn up. One of the letters recounts an interview with his father which gives sharp insight into these two men who loved each other, and knew it, with an intensity very rare in that relation.

I promised my father (as I think it was entirely his right, and mind you, it was on no prompting from him, nor has he any notion how serious the words were for me) that I shall never use a farthing of his money unless I am a Christian. He was talking of the duty of leaving money to children ; and then he said, " Of course there were certain conditions that superseded the call of blood ; for instance, did he think he had a son who thought as Tyndall thought, he could not leave his money to him ; he was not possessor of it to so great an extent ; he only held it in trust for the views in which he believed." So I said to him that I should reckon any person a thief who would use another's money in such circumstances. And he said fervently, " And a damned thief, too."

Mr. Stevenson, it will be seen, was also a maker of scruples. Neither father nor son could walk by the common rules of use and wont : they must work out uneasily their own standards of conduct. But the son had one admirable quality for which he takes credit to himself—and to his cousin Bob ; they were not resentful of actions or opinions injurious to themselves ; they were good at forgiving. The duty of tolerance is one on which Stevenson insisted. His nature was always against compromise in action ; David Balfour, in many ways the character in Steven-

son's books who most nearly represents their author, risks his life many times on a moral issue that is almost a punctilio, and does so after full deliberation ; but David is also shown as realising that even a great lawyer who knowingly departs from strict justice may none the less be a decent man. And though there is very little indeed in common between Alan Breck and Mr. Thomas Stevenson, David and Alan differ about questions of right and wrong as sharply as ever Stevenson differed from his father, yet affection survives. Each of the comrades in *Kidnapped* respects the other's entire sincerity, as in the Stevenson household the son respected the father.

The real drama of Stevenson's adventurous life lies in this early conflict. He had not merely to choose his own way of work against the wish and the judgment of those nearest to him ; he had also to withstand demands for intellectual submission, put with the whole force of a nature no less passionate than his own ; and yet he had so to maintain his resistance as not to kill kindness. This he did ; and after that, we may allow that he was fairly entitled to preach.

Preaching was a function which from the first he was inclined to exercise ; a curious item in the list of his published writings is *An Appeal to the Clergy of the Church of Scotland*, written in the autumn of 1874 and published in February 1875. The whole purport of it is that Christians should forgive each other for differing in opinion and avoid bitter and unseemly quarrels ; Stevenson is preaching to the preachers.

About the same time in 1875, Leslie Stephen, having come to lecture in Edinburgh, took his now recognised contributor to visit another writer in

trouble with his health. This was Henley ; one year older than Stevenson, he had been crippled by tubercular disease since his twelfth year, and had now been eighteen months in hospital, hoping that Lister might deliver him—as he did—from amputation of a second leg. Stevenson, well aware how small his own difficulties looked by comparison, was much impressed by the sick man's courage ; for he sat up talking of literature and art " as cheerfully as if he had been in a king's palace ". Intimacy followed ; it was for Stevenson the first contact with a literary vocation as powerful as his own. Each man encouraged the other ; two months later Henley wished that his *Verses from a Hospital* should appear with a dedication to his new friend.

From the time of his return in 1874 from the long stay as an invalid on the Riviera, Stevenson enjoyed a free foot, and such moderate command of money as enabled him to foot it. Emancipation, however, only became complete in July 1875 when, after a winter of attending law lectures in the university, he passed his final examination, was admitted to the Scottish bar, and appeared in court as holder of a complimentary brief. This being over, he headed straight to France, but returned in September and for some months walked the hall of the Parliament House among other advocates waiting for business. For a man of his disposition and purpose, this was merely wasting time, and very soon he abandoned even the appearance of seeking legal work, to throw himself passionately into his proper vocation. Wherever he was, he wrote incessantly, sometimes to order, more often experimentally—and much of the experimenting was now in

fiction. But he found also the school which he needed, the freest of all universities.

Every year from 1874 to 1879 he spent much of his time either in the Latin Quarter of Paris or at Barbizon and the forest haunts about Fontainebleau. The French impressionist movement, which powerfully affected painting in all countries, had then the ardour of a new gospel, still denounced as heresy ; and though Stevenson does not appear to have met any of the leading artists, all the young men were part of an army, a community of strongly marked individuals, yet banded for a common aim. The cult of craftsmanship has lasted better in France than anywhere else, down to the man who makes a pair of clogs or does a piece of plumbing ; and among the painters at Fontainebleau who came back from their day's work in the open to "the high inner chamber, panelled with indifferent pictures and lit by candles guttering in the night air", everyone joined in "talk and laughter that sounded far into the night", and everyone was concerned first and foremost to be a craftsman. All of them were pursuing as a matter of course what in Edinburgh was still regarded as a fantastic and forlorn undertaking. "It was a good place and a good life for any naturally minded youth ; better yet for the student of painting, and perhaps best of all for the student of letters. He too was saturated in this atmosphere of style ; he was shut out from the disturbing currents of the world ; he might forget that there existed other and more pressing interests than that of art." Stevenson wrote these reflections some ten years later in his paper on *Fontainebleau* ; but in the *Forest Notes* published in *Cornhill* for May 1876,

there is no question of any competing claims. He is busy simply with description of the forest itself, in spring and in autumn, of the memories that haunt it, and, above all, of the good life to be lived there when "you forget all your scruples and live a while in peace and freedom and for the moment only".

The forest, he says, was a bad place for actual writing; it had too many distractions; yet in fact the writer was drinking in what he would give out in his own fashion. Already the eye was his best faculty; he saw like a painter. "I want awfully to tell you about a piece of green sea," he wrote to Mrs. Sitwell in 1873, "and gulls and clouded sky, with the usual mountain-breaks to the southward. The sea near at hand was emerald; the white breasts and wings of the gulls as they circled above were dyed light green by the reflection." Not many painters even would have noted that. Millais once sent a message to Stevenson by Colvin (which is quoted in the Introduction to the *Letters*): "Tell him from me that to my mind he is the very first of living artists. I don't mean writers merely. Nobody living can see with such an eye as that fellow, and nobody is such a master of his tools."

An article written by Stevenson about an exhibition of portraits by Raeburn held at Edinburgh in the autumn of 1876 shows what the company of painters can do to instruct such a natural gift. This piece of writing has a double interest; for one thing, it was rejected by three magazines for which he had now frequently written, yet he persisted in his own judgment and included it in his first book of essays. For another, among the portraits which most attracted him by their human interest was that of Braxfield, the

hanging judge—afterwards to be the model for the formidable father in *Weir of Hermiston*.

Naturally, among the young men at Barbizon or Grez, most of whom were Frenchmen, there was talk of literature as well as of art. Stevenson had long read voraciously in French; he had come to speak the language fluently, and he trusted himself to pass judgment on French style. But, to judge by his excursions in criticism, what appealed to him was either work of the romantic revival (specially Hugo's), or of the Parnassian movement, then succeeding to it. The same taste led him back to the early French poetry, before Malherbe's coming; he wrote at this period his studies of Villon and of Charles d'Orléans. There is no evidence that he felt the charm of those classic French authors, to appreciate whom one must, it seems, be born into the genius of the race and of the language. Musset, whom he praised again and again, comes easy to an English reader; there is something of the Elizabethan fantasy in his prose and even in his verse. For Dumas, he had an enthusiasm which would have shocked French critics, since they are unable to forgive a certain commonness in the actual writing, even of *The Three Musketeers*; I have often thought that in this case foreigners have large compensation for what they lose by imperfect sense of the finer shades. But even if Stevenson were wrong in thinking—as he certainly did think—that Dumas at his best was a master of the style proper for romantic narrative, it cannot be doubted but that he himself was rendered more fastidious by his study of French writing. One of the best French critics, Abel Chevalley, says in his book on the English Novel that Stevenson



was not merely a *raconteur* but an *écrivain*, and that this combination is very rare in English fiction.

So far as English critical opinion was concerned, Stevenson first began to establish his reputation by his record of an adventure undertaken in 1876. *An Inland Voyage* tells us how he and one of his friends, Sir Walter Simpson,<sup>1</sup> made their way by canoes from Antwerp, up the Scheldt and the Belgian canals, and then (with a lift by train to Maubeuge) along other canals to the upper waters of the Oise, where an Englishman was as great a curiosity as a canoe. The river carried them as far as Pontoise, where it joins the Seine, and then they drew up their canoes and made their way back to Barbizon—having been a matter of three weeks on the journey, undisturbed by communications.

Stevenson had kept a log-book faithfully, and from this the record was written up in the following year; Kegan Paul published it in the spring of 1878. Words were used throughout with such studied care that the writer proclaimed himself what Mr. Richard Church has called "a verbal dandy"; and the trick of pen was emphasised by a printer's artificer—all the proper names and places being set out in italics. There was a manifest appeal to lovers of fastidious elegance; and a reviewer in the *Spectator* (probably old R. H. Hutton—though he was not then so old as I must always picture him) wrote on July 20th, 1878 :

Mr. Stevenson does not look at nature with the eye of a poet, but he does see nature through his own eyes instead of through the spectacles of books, and he can describe in

<sup>1</sup> He inherited a baronetcy from his father, Sir James Simpson, the physician who introduced the use of chloroform.

felicitous language what he has seen and what he feels. Now and then there is an attempt to say a good thing which results in failure, but on the whole his thoughts and quaint sayings seem to arise naturally, and the manipulation of the literary workman is not unduly prominent.

His style is founded on some of our earlier writers but it has a distinct flavour of its own. *An Inland Voyage* is not a book to charm everyone, but readers who like it at all will like it very much indeed.

Many such readers have enjoyed the singularly pleasant vein of humour with which Stevenson recounted the experiences, the delights and the discomforts of that journey: yet very few of them will have understood what he wrote into the last paragraph of all:

We had made a long detour out of the world, but now we were back in the familiar places, where life itself makes all the running, and we are carried to meet adventure without a stroke of the paddle. Now we were to return, like the voyager in the play, and see what rearrangements fortune had perfected the while in our surroundings; what surprises stood ready made for us at home; and whither and how far the world had voyaged in our absence. You may paddle all day long; but it is when you come back at nightfall, and look in at the familiar room, that you find Love or Death awaiting you beside the stove; and the most beautiful adventures are not those we go to seek.

Here is what had happened. When the voyagers got back to Grez in the forest of Fontainebleau, they found the artist colony all agog about an intrusion. Hitherto this had been a place for men—and occasionally for models; now, an American lady with her two children had come down and established herself and her easel among the men. She was a Mrs. Osbourne, whose marriage had not prospered and who had come to seek

a career in art. It is not recorded how she and Stevenson met, but after reading the essay *On Falling in Love*, which appeared in the *Cornhill* in the following February, I have no doubt that meeting and falling in love went close together. This was the adventure which he had not gone to seek.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ESSAYIST

IT is curious to read over in the light of biographical knowledge the essays which appeared together in 1881 under the general title *Virginibus Puerisque*. They were, as the preface which dedicated them to Henley said, designed to recapture a state of mind natural to five-and-twenty. Having read them first at about the age for which they were specially intended, I can testify to the delight they gave; but I did not then mark a transition in mood from the first essay to the third. All three are concerned with subjects very proper to that time of life—marriage and falling in love; but, looking at them now, when we know what to look for, we perceive that the collection opens with speculation on the possibilities which loom ahead of unfettered youth. "The shadow of matrimony waits, resolute and awful, at the cross-road." Gains and losses are weighed—Stevenson always had a balancing mind; but the unknown is contemplated with a certain shrinking of the spirit. *Talk and Talkers* tells us of three young men who during a stay of three months in the forest rambled incessantly together, talking incessantly on two subjects—theology and love. Doubtless two of three young men were himself

and his cousin Bob—"the two Stennises" as all Barbizon called them, finding Stevenson a name very distressing to the mouth. Doubtless also the result of these discussions may be found in the paper *Virginibus Puerisque* which Leslie Stephen published in the *Cornhill* of August 1876—a month before "the inland voyage" began. But in February of the following year came another discourse, *On Falling in Love*. The first of these essays had been a kind of shadow-boxing, describing a young man's airy apprehensions; the second was written after being knocked out. As the world knows, this kind of prostration is beatific, and Stevenson, always an interested spectator of his own emotions, sets his pen to describe with indulgent humour the benign beatitude of those who feel themselves in a new heaven and earth. Just here and there he lets emotion have its moment of frank discharge :

Love should run out to meet love with open arms. Indeed, the ideal story is that of two people who go into love step for step, with a fluttered consciousness, like a pair of children venturing together into a dark room. From the first moment when they see each other, with a pang of curiosity, through stage after stage of growing pleasure and embarrassment, they can read the expression of their own trouble in each other's eyes. There is here no declaration properly so called; the feeling is so plainly shared, that as soon as the man knows what it is in his own heart, he is sure of what it is in the woman's.

And indeed when Stevenson came to write stories instead of essays, the loves which he depicted were always very sudden affairs; mutual assurance comes mighty quick. But in this essay he gives us, for the most part, charming persiflage of the generosity proper to lovers: of their desire to see everybody else attain

to some inferior degree of the same felicity—completeness being of course the reward of special endowment, such as adorns the beatified. Yet there is more than persiflage in a passage which deals with the refinement of jealousy—a lover's resentment that the beloved should have known a life apart from his own :

The two people entertain no vulgar doubt of each other : but this pre-existence of both occurs to the mind as something indelicate. To be altogether right, they should have had twin birth together, at the same moment with the feeling that unites them. Then indeed it would be simple and perfect and without reserve or afterthought. Then they would understand each other with a fulness impossible otherwise. There would be no barrier between them of associations that cannot be imparted. They would be led into none of those comparisons that send the blood back to the heart. And they would know that there had been no time lost, and they had been together as much as was possible. For besides terror for the separation which must follow some time or other in the future, men feel anger, and something like remorse, when they think of that other separation which endured until they met.

One might easily read into this some record of feelings which would be not unnatural in a young man proposing to unite his life with that of a woman who is mother of two children by a living husband ; yet nothing in Stevenson's writings suggests that he suffered pain from this cause. Indeed, there was enough to perplex him without drawing on the finer feelings for more trouble. He had no income ; she was married and divorce at the moment did not seem attainable ; the happy ending was not in sight. Still, for two years after their first meeting Mrs. Osbourne remained in France, and he saw her freely. The two essays which Leslie Stephen published are printed as

the first and the third in the volume, and these represent a mood in which marriage is still a field for conjecture. But between the two is interposed a third, which has no specific title, presumably written in 1882, when the collected volume was in preparation—three years after Stevenson's marriage. All the phrases that cut deepest in this little group of kindred essays are found in these post-nuptial reflections :

Times are changed with him who marries ; there are no more bypath meadows where you may innocently linger, but the road lies long and straight and dusty to the grave. Idleness, which is often becoming and even wise in the bachelor, begins to wear a different aspect. . . . You have wilfully introduced a witness into your life . . . and can no longer close the mind's eye upon uncomely passages, but must stand up straight and put a name upon your actions. And your witness is not only the judge but the victim of your sins ; not only can she condemn you to the sharpest penalties but she must herself share feelingly in their endurance. And observe one thing more, with what temerity you have chosen precisely *her* to be your spy whose esteem you value highest and whom you have already taught to think you far better than you are. You may think you had a conscience and believed in God : but what is a conscience to a wife ? . . . To marry is to domesticate the Recording Angel. Once you are married there is nothing left for you, not even suicide, but to be good.

These thoughts belong to a maturer mind than Stevenson possessed in 1877 ; but it is the same mind expressing itself with the same grace-notes, and still (though well past thirty) unable to prune. That passage which has been quoted loses little by considerable excisions ; which is as much as to say that some excisions should have been made.

There is also in the volume a significant addition

to the essay *Ordered South*, which in its original form ended with the reflection that death is perhaps to be avoided rather for the sake of our friends than for our own. This, says the postscript, carries "something of the air of a betrayal". A man should be distressed by the fear of dying before he has accomplished the good which he might have done. "To have been so useless and now to lose the hope of being useful any more—there it is that death and memory assail him." Yet this graver mood is not rightly imported into the meditations of five-and-twenty or eight-and-twenty. The essential quality of Stevenson's earlier essays is found in gay phrases which express in a flash his characteristic philosophies. "For God's sake, give me the young man who has brains enough to make a fool of himself" he cries in *Crabbed Age and Youth*; and again, in *El Dorado*—"To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour".

In this period of his activity, between 1876 and 1879, while he himself was fit in body for roughing it out of doors, the dominant note of his writing is still the note of youth. This is felt very agreeably in the two little travel-books which were his first independent publications. Magazines had already made his name and style familiar to many readers; the *Cornhill* in particular under Leslie Stephen's editorship had high repute, and Stevenson appeared there first in 1874 with his article on *Victor Hugo's Romances*. From 1876 onwards for six years, work by him was to be found in every third or fourth number, and came to be eagerly looked for. But every writer must appear under his own flag before he will be seriously considered; and



the travel-books, though they were really work of an essayist, gave room for qualities that could not be displayed in the more restricted form.

They are very much alike in character, but with one sharp distinction between the books. Stevenson was distinguished by gifts which do not often go together, a talent for solitude and a talent for company, and the books illustrate these separately. On the "inland voyage" he had a comrade to talk to and compare notes with; in his journey through the Cevennes, even Modestine was not part of the original plan; and though she became a companion, she was not brought along for company. This solitary journey has more biographical interest; it tells us more of what was going on in Stevenson's mind. We can see now that solitude tempted him in the autumn of 1877 as it would not have tempted him twelve months earlier; he was in love and wanted to be alone with his thoughts. In both cases travel was in France, among a people who were always sympathetic to Stevenson—except their officials. In both, the route chosen lay off the beaten track and was chosen because a book about the adventures might make some appeal to curiosity. In both it was adventure with a purpose; if the canoe trip had been simply a joy-ride, it would doubtless have been abandoned half-way through, for these two young Scotsmen might have brought their own climate with them, to judge by the record of unrelenting rain. Sir Walter Simpson must have been a loyal comrade; he did not want to write a book; but Stevenson did, and the adventure had to be carried through for the sake of its purpose. Besides, rain was not the only affliction. Simpson was a well-appointed young

Briton, but Stevenson's costume was always very unconventional and never more so than on this journey; it must have been chiefly responsible for the fact that whenever they appeared, shouldering the sacks (probably Stevenson's idea) which were their only luggage, they were taken for pedlars; and though at one of the inns where they sought lodging, pedlars were of a social standing more admired than that of the ordinary clientèle, this case was exceptional; and the more desirable the hostelry, the more certain they were to meet rebuffs. Rudest of these was the last; it befel them when after abandoning their canoes at Pontoise they decided to tramp—walking separate, "the lean Arethusa" posting on ahead. (Each traveller throughout the book is referred to by the name of his craft: Simpson's canoe was the "Cigarette".)

The Arethusa is no precisian in attire; but by all accounts he was never so ill-inspired as on that tramp. . . . On his head he wore a smoking cap of Indian work, the gold lace pitifully frayed and tarnished. A flannel shirt of an agreeable dark hue, which the satirical called black; a light tweed coat made by a good English tailor; ready-made cheap linen trousers and leather gaiters completed his array. In person, he is exceptionally lean; and his face is not, like those of happier mortals, a certificate. For years, he could not pass a frontier, or visit a bank without suspicion; the police everywhere, but in his native city, looked askance upon him. If you will imagine him dressed as above, stooping under his knapsack, walking nearly five miles an hour with the folds of the ready-made trousers fluttering about his spindle shanks, and still looking eagerly round him as if in terror—the figure, when realised, is far from reassuring.

Officialdom was much of that opinion; and at Châtillon sur Loire a *gendarme* stopped the "Arethusa", asked

for his papers, and, learning that he had none, carried him before the Commissary. For even in 1878 France still was apprehensive of German spies; and in the interview which followed, the magistrate did not conceal his suspicions. Wit and argument were wasted; the vagrant must to jail, though there was not even the excuse for incarceration that I have heard of when a similar tramp was detained for having more money on him than his appearance warranted—Stevenson had only ten francs. Fortunately his companion, when he arrived, not only presented an appearance suitable to a gentleman of leisure on holiday, but could furnish good cash persuasion why they should be let out. It says much for Stevenson's literary conscience that he omitted from the volume the account of this closing adventure, which can only be read as a detached fragment in the collected editions of his works. Artistically, though it added to the humours which might have made the little book popular, it did not belong to the "inland voyage" proper. Yet I think it probable that he sacrificed it in order to close his pages with the paragraph which has been quoted in the last chapter, and which was written for one reader alone.

The *Travels with a Donkey* are full of such inner meanings. He says in the prefatory dedication to Sidney Colvin :

Every book is in an intimate sense a circular letter to the friends of him who writes it. They alone take his meaning : they find private messages, assurance of love and expressions of gratitude dropped for them in every corner. The public is but a generous patron who defrays the postage. Yet though the letter is directed to all, we have an old and kindly custom of addressing it on the outside to one.

So the book went forth, addressed "with pride" to Colvin: but it was for another eye that Stevenson ended his chapter on the Trappist monastery by blessing God, after three hours among the silent monks, that he was "free to wander, free to hope, and free to love". It was not for Sidney Colvin that he wrote down his reflections on waking from a night spent happily in his sleeping sack *à la belle étoile*.

Even while I was exulting in my solitude I became aware of a strange lack, I wished a companion to lie near me in the starlight, silent and not moving, but ever within touch. For there is a fellowship more quiet even than solitude, and which, rightly understood, is solitude made perfect. And to live out of doors with the woman a man loves is of all lives the most complete and free.

There is more of the man's inner mind in this book than in the gayer one. Meeting with extreme Catholic types at "Our Lady of the Snows", meeting with indurated Protestant types in the country of the Camisards, where wars of religion had raged savagely, he falls into much consideration of questions between creed and creed—recognising his own innate bias:

I own I met these Protestants with delight and a sense of coming home. I was accustomed to speak their language, in another and deeper sense of the word than that which distinguishes between French and English; for the true babel is a divergence upon morals. And hence I could hold more free communication with the Protestants, and judge them more justly, than the Catholics. Father Apollinaris may pair off with my mountain Plymouth Brother as two guileless and devout old men; yet I ask myself if I had as ready a feeling for the virtues of the Trappist; or had I been a Catholic, if I should have felt so warmly to the dissenter of La Vernède. With the first I was on terms of mere forbearance; but with the other,

although only on a misunderstanding and by keeping on selected points, it was still possible to hold converse and exchange some honest thoughts. In this world of imperfection we gladly welcome even partial intimacies. And if we find but one to whom we can speak out of our heart freely, with whom we can walk in love and simplicity without dissimulation, we have no ground of quarrel with the world or God.

Even from theology, it will be seen, we come back to the same refrain ; God is very good, since a young man loves and is an accepted lover. It is a pity to read this book without realising the state of mind in which it was written.

Here again a part of the original sketch was left out when the book was finally revised ; but this time it had stood at the beginning, being an account of Le Monastier, the town where he sojourned for some days before buying his donkey in the market-place. This came out as a separate paper in the *Portfolio*.

That magazine had already commissioned and published his *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh*, which spread over six numbers and then appeared as a book. The *Saturday Review* in criticising it commented on the new writer's style : " It speaks for itself ; it is captivating and irritating ; it keeps the attention awake ; it sketches in pictures ; in two words, it is never commonplace ; it retains an accent of the quaintness of a time of leisure ". Certainly it irritates ; the book is over-written : the note is often forced—as for instance :

Edinburgh has but partly abdicated, and still wears, in parody, her metropolitan trappings. Half a capital and half a country town, the whole city leads a double existence ; it has long trances of the one and flashes of the other ; like the king of the Black Isles, it is half alive and half a monumental marble.

Stevenson only wrote his best of what he thoroughly enjoyed or thoroughly disliked, and in Edinburgh he was torn between a deep-seated pride and a physical revulsion. After opening with praise of the city's commanding station, he quickly goes on to say how cruelly she pays for it in "one of the vilest climates under heaven":

For all who love shelter and the blessings of the sun, who hate dark weather and perpetual tilting against squalls, there could scarcely be found a more unhomely and harassing place of residence. Many such aspire angrily after that Somewhere-else of the imagination, where all troubles are supposed to end. They lean over the great bridge which joins the New Town with the Old—the windiest spot, or high altar, in this northern temple of the winds—and watch the trains smoking out from under them and vanishing into the tunnel on a voyage to brighter skies.

Or again listen to his description of the hall in the Parliament Close where the lawyers wait for business:

To breathe dust and bombazine, to feed the mind on cackling gossip, to hear three parts of a case and drink a glass of sherry, to long with indescribable longings for the hour when a man may slip out of his travesty and devote himself to golf for the rest of the afternoon, and to do this day by day and year after year, may seem so small a thing to the unexperienced! But those who have made the experiment are of a different way of thinking, and count it the most arduous form of idleness.

These *cris du cœur* reveal much; but the *Edinburgh* has no importance in Stevenson's literary output. It had, however, the effect of annoying a good many of his own countrymen, though Glasgow read with enjoyment what was written about Edinburgh. But when he wrote with equal freedom about Robert Burns,

Scotland's indignation was general. It was counted blasphemy to say that Burns spoilt his own nature and his genius by promiscuous amours; yet this was no more than Burns himself admitted. He might write of himself in letters as "an old hawk", well able to bring down his quarry; but there is none of that complacency when he says of such love-making, "But och! it hardens a' within, and petrifies the feeling". Scotsmen never quite forgave Stevenson these offences against national pride; he never had Scotland behind him, as Sir Walter had, or in our own day, Barrie.

The most interesting part in the work of these years, to a student of Stevenson's development, is found in the stories which now began to supplement his essay writing. First of these was *A Lodging for the Night* published in *Temple Bar* for October 1877; it was followed in January by another product of his studies in mediaeval French history, *The Sire de Malétroit's Door*. That same month *Cornhill* published *Will of the Mill*, where the scene is laid among the pinewoods under the mountain highroad of the Brenner Pass. Later, in 1878, Glasgow Brown, one of his Edinburgh friends who had helped to edit the *University Magazine*, brought out a weekly called *London*—which soon was transferred to Henley, now fully established as a journalist, and in this appeared serially, from June to October, the *New Arabian Nights*. After them came in the same paper a detached study, *Providence and the Guitar*, which retains its charm.

Stevenson had never any interest in the day-to-day concerns of any European life, and that is his limitation as a novelist. All the great ones have their characters planted solidly in a setting, and this is just as true of

Sir Walter as of Miss Austen or of Hardy : everything that really matters in the Waverley Novels belongs to the life of Edinburgh or of the Scotch border and Lowlands. But Stevenson, for all the ties that bound him to Scotland, had at this time no sense of local attachment ; what fascinated him was the general pageant of life ; he was at home everywhere and nowhere. History interested him, and he could reconstruct powerfully the settings of a scene in mediaeval France, with far keener feeling for the locality than Scott, for instance, showed in *Quentin Durward* ; but when in the *New Arabian Nights* he first attempted stories of modern life, London was chosen for his theatre. Yet England was, as he repeats in letters and in essays, almost as foreign a country to him as France ; and he writes of London only as occasional visitors know it. The scene is shifted to Paris, but he never knew Paris and the Parisians as he knew France and the French. This matters the less because these stories were meant to bear no closer relation to reality than the Arabian Nights bear—for a European. Yet I suspect that the great originals seemed to the actual persons who devised them, or for whom they were devised, far less arbitrary in their invention than they do to us. Magic and witchcraft were then common and accepted phenomena ; whereas the things which Stevenson described as happening in modern London or Paris remain unsubstantial because, with the best will in the world, they are not to be believed. Balzac's *Peau de Chagrin* is just as fantastic ; but that holds so closely together that the unreality is forgotten ; in Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights*, the pasteboard background cracks and gapes.



Yet in one passage there is already a display of real power, when the Suicide Club assembles and the cards are being dealt, to decide who on that evening is to be helped out of existence and who shall have the duty of effecting the release. It is a formidable imaginative study of the supreme thrill attending on the presence of fear. Apart from this, the stories do not bear re-reading; but at the time they pleased; Stevenson wrote with so much gusto, the actual phrases had so much life, that we were captivated by this contact with a new mind. If (as happened in nine cases out of ten) *Treasure Island* had sent us looking for what else we could find by the same author, here was a very different exhibition of the same narrative gift. But behind these there was not the same seriousness of invention. Their framework was first sketched out between Stevenson and his cousin in the spirit of a lark; *Treasure Island* indeed began in play, to amuse a boy; but the writer soon ceased to make believe; he was carried away by his reconstruction of a thing which might have happened.

Yet in two at least of these earlier stories, proof was given of a real gift for prose fiction. *Providence and the Guitar* preserves tender memories of artist life in the forest, as well as other memories, not tender, of French officialdom with which Stevenson so often collided. Still, plenty of other people might have written it, and it should have been written shorter. Some have praised *Will of the Mill*, and it was the first piece of his fiction that Leslie Stephen accepted for the *Cornhill*; yet I cannot care for it. But *The Sire de Malétroit's Door* will please anyone with the taste for Stevenson. Incidentally, it contains perhaps

the best of all his passages that celebrate the dawn, a natural phenomenon which this author appears to have observed much more frequently than most literary men. He was always an early riser.

*A Lodging for the Night* reached far higher. It revives a night in Paris, a night of deep snow, when François Villon and four other thieves sat drinking together, till one of the company, after a long losing game of cards, stabbed his opponent to the heart. Stevenson, as he told his secretary-stepdaughter in Samoa, had a special talent for the grim; and this was grim indeed. None of the many killings which he perpetrated in imagination is more vivid; but here the special point is the effect on a poetic temperament. After the dead man's pockets have been cleared and the proceeds divided, Villon, whose first reaction has been hysterical laughter, flings himself down and sobs—thus affording to the others the opportunity to relieve him of his purse. The band scatters at the door, and Villon, left alone, has to seek shelter in the snowbound city, well aware that each footprint links him to what may be a hanging job for all concerned. All this part could hardly be bettered, and the grimness deepens when, slipping into a doorway to evade the watch, he stumbles on the body of a street-walker, frozen to death. It is when he has rifled her body for money, and found only two six-pences under the garter, that he realises how he himself has been robbed. From that point on, the intensity slackens; yet the climax should have been reached in his interview with the hospitable *seigneur* who in compassion gives him "lodging for the night". Before they part, Villon has taken credit to himself

because he did not put a knife into his host and slip away with his gold flagons ; but the *seigneur's* reply drops below the key required. The story might have ended better, had he said to Villon : " You came in here skulking and frightened. You might have been less contemptible if you had done what you thought of doing but had not the nerve to do." Still, the first two-thirds of that tale reached a rare level of excellence, and this was the first piece of fiction by him that found publication. *Temple Bar* accepted what had grown out of a detailed study of documents for an essay on Villon, previously published in *Cornhill*. Books at this period fed Stevenson's imagination more usefully than his somewhat dilettante contacts with actual life.

In 1879, the character of these contacts altered dramatically and the effect on his work was immediately felt. Stronger airs blow through it. Towards the end of 1878, Mrs. Osbourne had been obliged to return with her children to California—though not to her married life ; the ocean and a continent were now between the lovers, as well as formidable difficulties. She wrote, however, that divorce seemed practicable ; but the next news was that she was seriously ill. Stevenson could no longer endure the separation and decided that his place was by her side. His parents could not be expected to approve of this attachment, and he was not willing either to use their help for an end they disliked, or to set out on such a journey definitely in conflict with their wishes. Accordingly, without word said to them, he took ship from the Clyde in an emigrant steamer, travelling second class, where accommodation differed from that

provided for steerage passengers chiefly in that he had a table to write at ; the food was the same, and not only he but working men found it uneatable. Yet his health does not seem to have suffered from the voyage ; but the journey by emigrant train across the continent put too fierce a strain on his frail body, and he reached California very near to death's door. Mrs. Osbourne had recovered, but while divorce had still to be accomplished, he was bound to keep away from her and lived by himself, first at Monterey on the Pacific coast, and then in San Francisco, cutting down his outlay to the lowest possible point, and working frantically in the hope to earn. His parents, angered by his departure, had broken off communication, and the estrangement distressed him deeply. But the plunge had been taken and he never looked back.

This was indeed the turning-point. All the work which this chapter has reviewed was done before he had completed his twenty-ninth year. It was all done while he was still loosely attached to his home in Scotland, running off at will to London, where he had now many friends in the literary world, or to Paris and Fontainebleau. It was done while he had as yet no definite responsibility for others and it was all done with a light heart.

If the period of acute illness which followed had brought the end of his career, he would perhaps have been remembered by students of the less known in literature as one of the most charming among essayists ; and here and there someone might have lit on the two travel books and read them with delight. Yet now even, with all the attention that was directed

on this early work by the success of what came later, not many people read *Virginibus Puerisque*, though the matters which it discusses cannot be said to "date". Of the travel books, one is kept in memory by its title; almost everybody knows that Stevenson travelled in the Cevennes with a donkey, but few remember much more, even if they ever gave themselves the opportunity of forgetting. I must confess that when I saw the gorge of the Tarn, and was amazed by the water's colour, I did not recall that Stevenson had described it: "Pools of the most enchanting sea-green shot with watery browns; crystal was not more clear, the meadows were not half so green". If I prefer that book to the *Inland Voyage*, although it has less gaiety, it is perhaps because when I did turn back to it, part at least of the scenery described was familiar to me—though a greater part would be strange even to most Frenchmen. But neither of the travel books, nor both of them together, nor even the best of the early essays achieved more than a *succès d'estime*. They showed the presence of a new writer, with notable command of a style, from whom more might be looked for; they did not appreciably contribute to the mark which Stevenson made on the mind of his time.

What was at the moment more important to himself, they had not achieved the object on which his mind was set. They had not enabled him to pay his way in the world, even on a hand-to-mouth reckoning; still less to discharge the debt which he felt himself bound in honour to clear off. He had not yet earned in any year so much as two hundred pounds by his pen; yet now he was preparing to take on the responsibility of

a wife and her two children. It seemed the maddest kind of a gamble ; but he wrote to Colvin from the emigrant ship : “ No man is any use till he has dared everything ; I feel just now as if I had, and so might become a man ”.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PLUNGE FOR FREEDOM

STEVENSON'S hope had been to recover the expenses of his migration by writing another travel book ; but the adventure did not, on a business footing, justify itself. *An Amateur Emigrant*, his account of the voyage, or rather of his fellow-passengers, was never published till after his death ; *Across the Plains*, which tells of the journey by emigrant trains, had to be many times recast and rehandled before it appeared four years later, first in *Longman's Magazine* and then as a book ; yet these were the resources by which he had hoped to keep the wolf from the door. One piece of fiction, written actually on the voyage, and sent off to Colvin from New York, found a home at once in a magazine called *The New Quarterly*, where probably very few people saw it. This was *The Story of a Lie* and would deserve little notice, were it not for the light that it throws on Stevenson's relations with his father.

The letters for the first six months after his departure tell us nothing explicitly except that he was very lonely ; and, implicitly, that his father and mother had ceased to write to him. But it seems probable that before he took his sudden departure there had been some culminating scene of disagreement ; and the

story he wrote on shipboard was in its essence one of a quarrel between father and son. The son, Dick Naseby, was a young gentleman who had frequented Paris and was "a type-hunter among mankind. He despised small game and insignificant personalities whether in the shape of dukes or bagmen, letting them go by like seaweed ; but let him hear a plangent or a penetrating tone, fish for him with a living look in someone's eye, a passionate gesture, a meaning or ambiguous smile, and his mind was instantaneously awakened." This of course is a self-portrait—*anno aetatis xxix*. Dick's father, Squire Naseby, "had the sturdy untutored nature of the upper middle class. The universe seemed plain to him. 'The thing's right', he would say, or 'the thing's wrong' and there was an end of it. There was a contained prophetic energy in his utterances, even on the slightest affairs ; he *saw* the damned thing ; if you did not, it must be from perversity of will, and this sent the blood to his head. Apart from this, which made him an exacting companion, he was one of the most upright, hot-tempered old gentlemen in England." That description fits what we know of Mr. Thomas Stevenson.

The account goes on : "Whenever the pair argued, they came to an open rupture ; and arguments were frequent, for they were both positive and both loved the work of the intelligence". But there were reconciliations, till one fatal day the Squire "wrote a flaming letter to the papers" on a political matter which led to a stinging rejoinder ; and it appeared to Dick Naseby that his father had been badly routed. His plain duty, as he saw it, was to inflict personal chastisement on the editor ; but, having set out armed



with that intention and a significant cudgel, he met a weakly person who answered him with plain reason, and appealed to his sense of fair play. He went back and told the angry Squire that his duty was to apologise, and the storm broke.

None of this is very credible, and it has the disadvantage of recalling famous scenes in Meredith; but in the last paragraph of the chapter we come on words so vital that they seem oddly out of place. "Dick beat a retreat in a disarray of nerves, a whistling and clamour of his own arteries, and in short in such a final bodily disorder as made him alike incapable of speech or hearing. And in the midst of all this turmoil, a sense of impardonable injustice remained graven in his memory." What follows is hardly less revealing. "Dick and his father were henceforth on terms of coldness. The upright old gentleman grew more upright when he met his son, buckrammed with immortal anger; he asked after Dick's health and discussed the weather and the crops with an appalling courtesy; his pronunciation was *point-de-vise*, his voice was distant, distinct, and sometimes almost trembling with suppressed indignation." Compare that with one of the letters written to Mrs. Sitwell when the trouble first broke out: Stevenson has just seen his father going out to the post and watched for him coming back. "Oh, if he would only whistle! But of course, no. I have killed that note."

These passages give the real reason why Stevenson was wisely guided by his instinct when he broke away. While he lived as part of that narrow household, so closely tied by such domineering exactions, he could never be his own man. It was, considering his physical

weakness, a desperate venture, but in one happy instance, the reward of successful work came soon. At Monterey, after "a week's misery and a fortnight's illness", out of which two old frontiersmen—finding him derelict in the woods with only a sleeping sack for shelter—nursed him at their ranch, he "kicked and spurred his vile body forward", to drafting the impressions of his journey. It was work done against the grain; fiction was tempting him; he was busy at the same time on a novel to be called *A Vendetta of the West*, full of the new sights and types that surrounded him, in a country where lynch-law still ruled, and the revolver was a good argument. But from this also he turned away in October, when he conceived and carried out at white heat by far the best story he had yet written—*The Pavilion on the Links*. The tale is of extraordinary violence, yet harmonises with its background; and for that background he put the Pacific coast out of mind and went back to the shores of Fife. It is one of several instances in his work where the inanimate scene is so painted as to suggest violent happenings before the human actors appear; in sketching it, he drew on what he had noted and remembered of wild outlying places on the Scottish coast, visited by him with his father or on his father's business; and it is charged with a sense of the traps and perils which may environ a seaboard. The vision which constructed it, from a stretch remembered here and a stretch there, was the vision of one trained to study seas from the land, with a view to seamen's dangers. With admirable insight he has depicted not the shore only but the land behind it, and the very kind of scrub and timber which are to be looked for in such a place. He

has said somewhere that every novelist before he sets to work should have a map clear in his head (if not actually drawn) and the points of the compass determined. Here is one passage—but only one of many—setting out the scene of events in which links and tide-way and quicksand all had their part to play, almost as conscious actors :

The country, I have said, was mixed sand-hill and links ; *links* being a Scottish name for sand which has ceased drifting and become more or less solidly covered with turf. The pavilion stood on an even space ; a little behind it, the wood began in a hedge of elders huddled together by the wind ; in front, a few tumbled sand-hills stood between it and the sea. An outcropping of rock had formed a bastion for the sand, so that there was here a promontory in the coast-line between two shallow bays ; and just beyond the tides, the rock again cropped out and formed an islet of small dimensions but strikingly designed. The quicksands were of great extent at low water, and had an infamous reputation in the country. Close in shore, between the islet and the promontory, it is said they would swallow a man in four minutes and a half ; but there may have been little ground for this precision. The district was alive with rabbits, and haunted by gulls which made a continual piping about the pavilion. On summer days the outlook was bright and even gladsome ; but at sundown in September, with a high wind, and a heavy surf rolling in close along the links, the place told of nothing but dead mariners and sea disaster. A ship beating to windward on the horizon, and a huge truncheon of wreck half buried in the sands at my feet, completed the innuendo of the scene.

The story is one of two strong men, who after years of almost misanthropic isolation find themselves suddenly in collision for the possession of a girl, and at the same time involved in the task of saving her life. Her father, a defaulting banker, is pursued by Italian

Carbonari whose funds he had appropriated ; and the presence of these alien agents of revenge in that stark northern landscape adds to the strangeness of the tale. But violent and passionate as the happenings are, all hangs together fitly, both words and acts ; and it would bear comparison even with Merimée's *Colomba*, another story of vendetta.

The four characters, summarily sketched, stand out in bold relief. Stevenson used the method which he was to find best suited to his talent, narrative in the first person. There is this also to be observed. If we wish to know how Stevenson thought about the lady with whom he was passionately in love, we can read how Cassilis, the hero of the tale, speaks of his Clara. Apart from question of her beauty (which is merely affirmed, not described) he dwells on her courage, and her boldness in their first surprising encounter, but notes that there went with it " an old-fashioned precision of manner ". Add to this, though the story perhaps imposed it, that the love impulse is of the suddenest ; so that after two brief meetings, without a word of courtship, the two are in each other's arms.

This piece of work was the one satisfaction in that winter of discontent. He was full of labours, toiling hard at the *Amateur Emigrant*, designed to be a book about the size of his *Travels with a Donkey* ; toiling hard at his *Vendetta of the West*, with its scene laid mostly in Monterey and the surrounding country ; he was even reporter for the *Monterey Californian* at a salary of two dollars a week. Money was all his cry. " I hope soon to have a greater burden to support and must make money a great deal quicker than I used.

I may get nothing for the *Vendetta*; I may only get some forty for the *Emigrant*; I cannot hope to have them both done much before the end of November." Since he left England in August, he had written *The Story of a Lie* and *The Pavilion on the Links*; two books also completed inside four months would have been hard going even for a man in full health; and the results of his furious labour were discouraging. The first part of the *Emigrant* went off to England, but when Stevenson moved to San Francisco in January, there came a letter from Colvin, telling him it was dull. Henley also thought his *Story of a Lie* poor stuff, warned him against imitating Meredith, and even admitted that he had "despised the Donkey". Yet it was Henley who (against Stevenson's judgment) sent *The Pavilion on the Links* to Cornhill, and there was great joy when Leslie Stephen accepted it—in spite of its awkward length and of its "blood and thunder". Stevenson burst into song:

"Well, I thought it had points; now I know it. And I'm to see a proof once more. O Glory, Hallelujah, how beautiful is proof. His favourite words he always finds his friends misunderstand. With oaths he reads his articles, moist brow and clenched hand. Impromptoo. The last line first rate."

There is little of such jolly nonsense in the letters of these months; he was setting his teeth and gritting them; but one cry of protest escaped him:

Frankly, Colvin, do you think it a good plan to be so eminently descriptive, and even eloquent in dispraise? You rolled such a lot of polysyllables over me that a better man than I might have been disheartened. However, I was not, as you see, and am not. The *Emigrant* shall be

finished and leave in the course of next week. And then, I'll stick to stories. I am not frightened. I know my mind is changing ; I have been telling you so for long ; and I suppose I am fumbling for the new vein. Well, I'll find it.

The *Vendetta* you will not much like, I daresay : and that must be finished next ; but I'll knock you with *The Forest State : A Romance*. (This was the first form of *Prince Otto*.)

My health is better, my spirits steadier, I am not the least cast down. If the *Emigrant* was a failure, the *Pavilion*, by your leave, was not : it was a story quite adequately and rightly done, I contend ; and when I find Stephen, for whom certainly I did not mean it, taking it in, I am better pleased with it than before. I know I shall do better work than ever I have done before ; but, mind you, it will not be like it. My sympathies and interests are changed. There shall be no more books of travel for me. I care for nothing but the moral and the dramatic, not a jot for the picturesque or the beautiful, other than about people. It bored me hellishly to write the *Emigrant* ; well, it's going to bore others to read it ; that's only fair.

In short, the essential artist was developing, and I should put *The Pavilion on the Links* as the first piece of work in which Stevenson really found himself. As he says in his *Gossip on Romance*, the writer's true achievement must be plastic :

To embody character, thought, or emotion in some act or attitude that shall be remarkably striking to the mind's eye—this is the highest and hardest thing to do in words ; the thing which, once accomplished, equally delights the schoolboy and the sage, and makes, in its own right, the quality of epics. Compared with this, all other purposes in literature, except the purely lyrical or the purely philosophic, are bastard in nature, facile of execution, and feeble in result. It is one thing to write about the inn at Burford, or to describe scenery with the word-painters ; it is quite another to seize on the heart of the suggestion and make a

country famous with a legend. It is one thing to remark and to dissect, with the most cutting logic, the complications of life, and of the human spirit ; it is quite another to give them body and blood in the story of Ajax or of Hamlet. The first is literature, but the second is something besides, for it is likewise art. . . .

In the highest achievements of the art of words, the dramatic and the pictorial, the moral and romantic interest, rise and fall together by a common and organic law. Situation is animated with passion, passion clothed upon with situation. Neither exists for itself, but each inheres indissolubly with the other. This is high art ; and not only the highest art possible in words, but the highest art of all, since it combines the greatest mass and diversity of the elements of truth and pleasure. Such are epics, and the few prose tales that have the epic weight.

Nobody would call *The Pavilion on the Links* a masterpiece ; but it is good romantic invention ; a situation " is realised in the story with enticing and appropriate details " ; the tale is a good tale because we easily identify ourselves with the chief actor—and the more easily because it is a love story written by a young man very much in love. All the qualities that had been shown in the travel books are shown here, the power to suggest a landscape in vivid language, the feeling for picturesque traits of character ; but with them is now a new faculty of architecture, the power to construct a moving tale which does not merely amuse (as in the *New Arabian Nights*) but captures the imagination.

The new way was not easy going : his *Vendetta* never came to anything ; though he conceived and planned out his *Prince Otto* in this stay at San Francisco, it was long before it took shape, and the *Emigrant* was not yet finished. Essays, indeed, were getting

written, including one on Thoreau, which he took with justice to be close on his best so far. It has a special interest if we remember in what circumstances it was written. Thoreau was a man who contrived to make himself independent of money, and yet found, even when health was gone, a "content and ecstasy in living". Stevenson was divided between admiration for the man who set so high a value on freedom, and distaste for the limitation of his desires. "Like a child", he says, "Thoreau disliked the taste of wine—or, perhaps, living in America, had never tasted any that was good"—(a conjecture which is eloquent as to what Stevenson drank at Monterey and in San Francisco). But in essence, he agreed with Thoreau about the matter which in these months chiefly occupied him—"the position of money" in a rational existence. "A certain amount, varying with the number and the empire of our desires" (and Stevenson did not pretend to limit his desires by Thoreau's measure), "is a true necessity to each one of us in the present order of society, but beyond that amount, money is a commodity to be bought or not to be bought, a luxury in which we may either indulge or stint ourselves, like any other. And there are many luxuries that we may legitimately prefer to it, such as a grateful conscience, a country life, or the woman of our inclination."

But one thing was clear to him, the price for money must be paid in freedom; and for the present he was a slave to his pen, not even assured of wages. To crown all, though he now knew most clearly what he wanted in life, what he wanted to live for, it was not very certain that he would live.



I am now engaged to be married to the woman whom I have loved for three years and a half (he wrote to Gosse, one of the closest friends he had made in London). I do not know yet when the marriage can come off; for there are many reasons for delay. But as few people before marriage have known each other so long or made more trials of each other's tenderness and constancy, I permit myself to hope some quiet at the end of all. At least I will boast myself so far; I do not think many wives are better loved than mine will be. Third and last, in the order of what has changed my feelings, my people have cast me off, and so that thundercloud, as you may almost say, has overblown. You know more than most people whether or not I loved my father. These things are sad; nor can any man forgive himself for bringing them about; yet they are easier to meet in fact than by anticipation. I almost trembled whether I was doing right, until I was fairly summoned; then, when I found that I was not shaken one jot, that I could grieve, that I could sharply blame myself, for the past, and yet never hesitate one second as to my conduct in the future, I believed my cause was just and I leave it with the Lord. I certainly look for no reward, nor any abiding city either here or hereafter, but I please myself with hoping that my father will not always think so badly of my conduct nor so very slightly of my affection as he does at present.

Thoughts of death were more in his mind at this period than perhaps ever again; that same letter carries the sketch of an epitaph for himself, ending with two lines from what will always be his best known poem—*Requiem*:

Home is the sailor, home from sea,  
And the hunter home from the hill.

That also may be regarded as a landmark—the first time when Stevenson found characteristic and complete expression in verse. The epitaph's prose utters (with a pathetic lack of distinction) his haunting desire to

preach. "Can I make some one happier this day before I lie down to sleep? Thus the dead man speaks to you from the dust."

He very nearly had need of a tombstone: the four-year-old boy in his lodgings was dying and Stevenson, whose passion for children was intense, sat up with him till his own weak health broke. Mrs. Osbourne now came to take charge of him and she and a kind doctor pulled him through; on April 8th he was able to write to a friend as "a rejected passenger from Charon's ferry". But having escaped, he looked forward to be "married in May and then go to the mountains"; and so it happened. His people at home, having heard of his illness and of the marriage, telegraphed to him, "Count on £250 annually". This welcome message lifted the sick man out of "a circle of hell unknown to Dante—that of the penniless and dying author".

Not every penniless author, well or dying, has the luck to be so supported at the critical moment. But in justice to Stevenson, as a struggler, it should be set down that his first impulse was to write to Colvin, bidding him send back the manuscript of the *Emigrant*: "Say your worst and most incisively, for now it will be a help and I'll make it right or perish in the attempt". That was valiancy.

Yet after all, he never made a good job of that study. The main interest it has is in the light that it throws on the character of Stevenson himself before marriage set its mark on him. During the ten-day passage, being used to the sea, he did not suffer the torments which sickness inflicted on many of his fellow-passengers; and if he found the food uneatable, he was no more

disgusted by it than many who were working men. But with his usual sociability he made acquaintance everywhere, and none of those about him took him for anything much different from themselves :

The sailors called me "mate", the officers addressed me as "my man", my comrades accepted me without hesitation for a person of their own character and experience, but with some curious information. One, a mason himself, believed I was a mason ; several, and among these at least one of the seamen, judged me to be a petty officer in the American navy ; and I was so often set down for a practical engineer that at last I had not the heart to deny it.

As to the saloon passengers who occasionally made a tour of exploration into the steerage, "they gave me a hard dead look, with the flesh about the eye kept unrelaxed". He himself found the manners of those among whom he moved "as gentle and becoming as those of any other class".—"To be a gentleman is to be one all the world over, and in every relation and grade of society", he comments ; and some of his fellow-passengers seemed to him to be "excellent gentlemen. They were not rough nor hearty nor disputatious ; debated pleasantly, suffered kindly ; were helpful, gentle, patient and placid. . . . A thing may be fine like ironwork without being delicate like lace. There was here less delicacy, but I do not think that there was less effective refinement, less consideration for others, less polite suppression of self. I speak of the best among my passengers ; for in the steerage, as well as in the saloon, there is a mixture."

These seem the most significant of his reflections ; and they certainly convey the nature of the man who

made them, as he was forming his philosophy of life. On board, his constant occupation vastly entertained such of the officers and officials as knew, roughly, who and what he was. "Well," they would say, "still writing?" But the purser in a compassionate moment offered him "another kind of writing—for which you will be paid". It was to copy out the list of passengers.

After all, this was not so very unlike the view taken of his chosen vocation by those among whom he was brought up. Since that time, writing has come to be widely recognised as a business in which there is money to be made; and even such a venture as that of travelling steerage has often been profitably undertaken with an eye to exploitation in print. But the writing fraternity has learnt better than Stevenson ever knew or cared to know what it is the public wants. He set down only what had interested himself, and that was the human quality of the folk among whom he passed these ten days. If he did not succeed in constructing from his reflections a successful work of art, he certainly acquired valuable experience. For a young man who had lived all his life among either the well-to-do or the well-educated, such jostling among the ruck of humanity—most of them being, as he recognised, Europe's failures—was a sure way to enlarge the mind; and he was the better able to profit because something in his nature exempted him from carrying the obvious label of his own class. If thirteen years later he was able to create with mastery the very common Englishman who is the hero of his *Beach of Falesá*, with equal appreciation of his native chivalry and of his limited intelligence, twenty days of intimate contact with uneducated men on that journey by boat

and by train had given him the groundwork ; though long years of familiarity with a strange landscape, and a way of life strange to civilisation, were needed before the story in which Wiltshire figures could be even conceived.

## CHAPTER V

### UPHILL FIGHTING

THOSE who read *The Silverado Squatters* are little likely to gather from its contents that they are following the adventures of a honeymoon : Stevenson, so communicative in public about many matters, was extremely reticent upon his intimate affections. Nor is there more in it than a hint that the adventures had been undertaken by an invalid in search of a health resort ; and a wilder gamble, when one knows the facts, could hardly have been invented. California was littered with derelict habitations ; and the project was to settle down for a simple life rent-free in one of them. So, after a rest of some four days at Calistoga on the slopes of Mount Saint Helena, he, his wife and her son were guided to Silverado, where a building remained that had been occupied by an encampment of miners. It had walls and windows, but no window-panes ; it would not have been tenable except in a rainless climate ; and whatever was done there had to be done by the Stevensons themselves—since Master Lloyd Osbourne at eight years old cannot have been of much assistance.

I never could read the book with enjoyment, because the atmosphere of discomfort and raw recent dilapida-

tion comes through in spite of the writer. It was not written on the spot, but doubtless Stevenson after his fashion jotted down many notes, and two vivid passages were probably composed under the immediate impression. One of these describes the spectacle of an immense sea fog surging slowly in and gradually submerging the mountain; the other paints a night of stars. This passage follows on the mention of "a melancholy interregnum": Mrs. Stevenson and her son both fell sick (according to Graham Balfour, of no less than diphtheria) and the family had to "hurry back to Calistoga and a cottage on the Green". When the illness was over, all attempts to hire a Chinese boy proved unavailing, but a friendly artist joined them as cook and companion. Departure had been long delayed, and before they left the track for Calistoga and struck the main road, night came:

I have never seen such a night. It seemed to throw calumny in the teeth of all the painters that ever dabbled in starlight. The sky itself was of a ruddy, powerful, nameless, changing colour, dark and glossy like a serpent's back. The stars, by innumerable millions, stuck boldly forth like lamps. The Milky Way was bright, like a moonlit cloud; half heaven seemed Milky Way. The greater luminaries shone each more clearly than a winter's moon. Their light was dyed in every sort of colour—red, like fire; blue, like steel; green, like the tracks of sunset; and so sharply did each stand forth in its own lustre that there was no appearance of that flat, star-spangled arch we know so well in pictures, but all the hollow of heaven was one chaos of contesting luminaries—a hurly-burly of stars. Against this the hills and rugged tree-tops stood out redly dark.

As we continued to advance, the lesser lights and Milky Way first grew pale, and then vanished; the countless hosts of heaven dwindled in number by successive millions; those that still shone had tempered their exceeding bright-

ness and fallen back into their customary wistful distance ; and the sky declined from its first bewildering splendour into the appearance of a common night. Slowly this change proceeded, and still there was no sign of any cause. Then a whiteness like mist was thrown over the spurs of the mountain. Yet a while, and, as we turned a corner, a great leap of silver light and net of forest shadows fell across the road and upon our wandering waggonful ; and, swimming low among the trees, we beheld a strange, misshapen, waning moon, half-tilted on her back.

Two in our waggon knew night as she shines upon the tropics, but even that bore no comparison. The nameless colour of the sky, the hues of the star-fire, and the incredible projection of the stars themselves, starting from their orbits, so that the eye seemed to distinguish their positions in the hollow of space — these were things that we had never seen before and shall never see again.

That, it will be agreed, is superb descriptive writing. Yet the main interest of the little book (not actually written till three years later) lies in what it shows of Stevenson's early reactions to the United States. To complete the record, *Across the Plains* must be read, and also his sketch of San Francisco, *A Modern Cosmopolis*. These, like the *Squatters*, did not appear till 1883, but in 1880 *Fraser's Magazine* brought out *The Old Pacific Capital* in which Monterey is vividly described. Out of all these we can gather why it was that America took so kindly to the English writer. Nothing could be sharper than his awareness that he was in a foreign land ; New York when he landed shocked him by the roughness, even the rudeness, of ordinary contacts ; but he was quick to note a most unusually kind helpfulness behind it. On his train journey, when he saw a shabby drunken passenger pitched summarily out of a moving train, " followed



by a peal of laughter from the cars ", he noted : " They were speaking English all about me, but I knew that I was in a foreign land ". But then, England itself was a foreign country to this vagrant Scot, and time and again he said so ; while, on the other hand, however far he travelled in the United States, he found Scots welcoming him. The Pacific coast where he made his first lasting contacts was for his temperament easier of access than the long settled East ; here was a *colluvies gentium*, in which he had as good a right to feel at home as the next man. At Monterey his meals were provided by a Frenchman ; and throughout his life, wherever Stevenson found a Frenchman he found a friend—unless indeed the Frenchman was an official. At the same little tables there sat Germans, Mexicans, half-breed Indians and now and then a Japanese. In San Francisco ingredients of the medley were many times multiplied ; yet in San Francisco he was too sick and too hard-set for pleasant observation—though passages in *The Wrecker* show how he explored its slums. But when he betook him for convalescence to an outlying valley among the mountains, where the first influx of mining population had come and gone, and the second wave of more lasting settlement was still only approaching, he made a series of genial and significant sketches. First was " a brave old white-faced Swede ", discharged penniless after long years at sea, who had " settled down to make a new life of it "—proud owner of a ranch which could show some petrified vegetation, and who greeted Stevenson as one from " my old country "—for he had done nearly all his sailing in Scottish ships. Next came an authentic Scotsman who had gone into the cultivation of Cali-

fornian wine—and beside him a German, formerly a barber. “ I am interested in all wines and have been all my life ”, Stevenson wrote sympathetically, with a good word for the Californian product, “ if properly matured and bearing its own name ” (conditions rarely fulfilled). Next came the lord paramount of Napa Valley, an amiable expansive Russian Jew to whom the entire neighbourhood paid tribute—even Mr. Corvin, keeper of the Toll House hotel, where stage-coaches met and passed, at the point where civilisation approached nearest to Silverado. Finally, there was the Hansom family, squatters in what had once been the Silverado Hotel: closely related to the class of “ poor whites ” who “ inhabit the fringes of settlements and the deep quiet places of the country ; rebellious to all labour and pettily thievish like the English gipsies ; rustically ignorant, but with a touch of wood lore and the dexterity of the savage ”. This family, whose head was a hunter living by what deer he could kill (with an occasional grizzly thrown in), was the chief representative of America in the life of Silverado. But before Stevenson had left the place, “ two town gentlemen with cigars and kid gloves ” had appeared, talking of drifts and dollars ; and next day he was confusedly a partner to some proceedings by which the hunter intended to jump the town gentlemen’s claim. Also, it was in the Napa Valley that he first made use of a telephone, and the purpose was to speak with a stage-driver illustrious on a road “ where the guard travels armed and the stage is not only a link between country and city and the vehicle of news, but has a faint warfaring aroma ”. “ So it goes in these young countries ”, he moralises ; “ tele-

phones and telegraphs and newspapers and advertisements running far ahead among the Indians and grizzly bears."

He had put these feelings into verse while he lived in San Francisco :

You speak another tongue than mine,  
Though both were English born.  
I towards the night of time decline,  
You mount into the morn.

Youth shall grow strong and great and free,  
But age must still decay :  
Tomorrow for the States : for me  
England and yesterday.

In short, though his observations of American life were critical, the criticism had a tone which America did not dislike ; and when *The Silverado Squatters* got written, a large part of it appeared first in the *Century Magazine*—opening up that connection with American periodicals to which Stevenson owed most of his prosperity.

But the main significance of this period in his wandering existence is that he had stood at a gateway through which first glimpses came to him of the only life in which he was ever to be at home. San Francisco was the main port of the Pacific. Every harbour, every kind of shipping, tempted Stevenson, and here, in the world's most crowded and capacious port, was every diversity of rig, every flag that the seas know. Among the few friends whom his straitened way of living permitted him to make was Mr. Charles Warner Stoddard, who had cruised in the South Seas and had written of his cruises ; and he, it seems, was the first to make Stevenson acquainted with Herman Melville's

novels. A seed was planted then which lay dormant for long in the subconscious imagination.

But at the moment, as soon as some return of health made a long journey possible, desire for reunion with his family mastered all else : and after two months of the Napa Valley, Stevenson with his wife and her son set out for home. From the time when his parents met them at Liverpool in mid-August there was an end of domestic unhappiness, and Mr. Stevenson, Graham Balfour says, behaved about his daughter-in-law as if he had made the match himself. Then they all went off to Highland places, thought suitable for the invalid. He liked the country-side about Strathpeffer—" beech woods, heather and a stream"—but did not take kindly to the company; nor did the climate suit his chest. Doctors ordered him to winter in Davos, where he with his wife and her son were established by the end of October.

Writing was still out of the question; since his marriage he had only completed the sketch of *Monterey*, done while they were at Calistoga. This came out in *Fraser's*; the *Cornhill* too, publishing in succession things that he had done before his marriage—notably *The Pavilion on the Links*,—kept his name before the reading public. The *Emigrant* book also was due to appear; it had even been paid for; but he himself and his friends thought that it would injure his reputation as a writer, and Mr. Stevenson bought back the manuscript.

No artist can easily shake off the habits of his art and Stevenson loved composition as a painter loves dabbling with his brushes; so now, as happened always when illness kept him from his desk, he fell to writing

verses. During the period of his loneliness in California he had, as has been seen, struck out at least the first draft of his *Requiem* ; he had also completed two much longer poems. One of these, *Not yet my soul*, showed the same preoccupation with thoughts of death, but moralised on the necessity for resistance :

Leave not, my soul, the unfoughten field, nor leave  
Thy debts dishonoured, nor thy place desert,  
Without due service rendered.

This found a place in the *Atlantic Monthly*. About the same time was written *It is not yours, O Mother, to complain*, which again is a piece of moralising :

As the fervent smith of yore  
Beat out the glowing blade,  
Nor wielded in the front of war  
The weapons that he made,  
But in the town at home still plied his ringing trade,

So like a sword the son shall roam  
On nobler missions sent,  
And as the smith remained at home  
In peaceful turret pent,  
So sits the while at home the mother well content.

Both are powerful pieces of writing, in verse competently handled ; yet, like a great part of Stevenson's poetry, they appear to express thoughts that he could have uttered better in that high-wrought prose of which he had such mastery. Poetry fails if it does not convey something either of song or dance—a gesture of the mind, an utterance charged with rhythmic emotion. In his *Requiem*—of which at least the two essential lines were composed at this period—something is expressed which prose could not give ; the words go singing. In the two longer poems, whether it be the address to his own soul, or the reflections on

a mother's part in her son, thought is packed and hammered into a rhythmic form, but the rhythm does not arise inevitably out of the emotion. Yet in the earliest written of all the verses which he preserved for publication there was this natural correspondence ; the *Song of the Road* has a tune in it ; and the half-dozen of lines composed when he and his donkey spent the night under the stars are not words written to be sung, but they have a dance in them, and the last couplet suggests irresistibly a final caper and stamp of the foot :

When we put up, my ass and I,  
At God's green caravanserai.

During the whole of his life Stevenson was experimenting with verse, and occasionally succeeded in fixing a moment of inspiration. But in general, success came only through the simplest verse forms, while in prose he showed mastery with every kind of movement from apparent rudeness of speech up to the most elaborate. The truth is that verse was his plaything, prose the real instrument of his craft.

About this time, too, he began to experiment with verses in the Scots tongue. *The Scotsman's Return from Abroad* was published by *Fraser's Magazine* in November 1880, and lines to the author of *Rab and his Friends* were written before he left Scotland for Davos. Stevenson of course had known the "Lallan tongue" all his life ; he had heard it constantly spoken through the Lothians by country folk, and a note in the *Letters* suggests that his own father used still to slip into it even when talking to men of his own breeding : "I ken weel this is my last visit to the South", he said to Sir James Dewar a few weeks before he died. It was

easy for Stevenson, perhaps almost as easy as it had been for Scott, to make his characters speak in it ; but for all that, it was not the language of his mind. He could use Lallan as Burns could use English, idiomatically and correctly ; but Burns thought and felt in Lallan, and his poetry is in the language of his thought and his feeling. Scott had worked so long on the Border Ballads that it was no conscious effort for him to carry on the tradition ; and in truth while Sir Walter lived, Lowland Scots was hardly less than English the language of Edinburgh. With Stevenson, when he uses Lallan for an expression of his own thought in verse, there is always the sense of an exercise ; and when that is felt, there can never be authentic poetry. A greater master of English than Stevenson, Jonathan Swift, found the ultimate expression of his fierce nature in Latin words that are the best known of all his utterances : yet we cannot imagine Stevenson writing his epitaph in Lallan. But one thing came of the gymnastics in Scots verse and Scots prose which at this period he attempted : when there was occasion in his novels to make an imagined character speak Scots, and broad Scots, he had full mastery. No sentences that he wrote are more charged with life than those which are put into the mouth of Archie Weir's formidable father. Alan Breck, whose native tongue is Gaelic, speaks a less fully nourished idiom ; but it also is live stuff.

At this time Stevenson's mind was applied to Scottish history and more specially to that of the Highlands. Though he was in the first place a vagrant student of humanity, yet he never relied only on his

eyes and ears ; when he went across the plains to California, six volumes of Bancroft's *History of the United States* weighed down the amateur emigrant's travelling sack. Now on his return, when the fascination of Highland scenery took hold of him, his first thought was to write history. What came out of it in the end was *Kidnapped* and *Catriona* ; but the imagination which shaped them had been nourished by a very wide course of reading, undertaken with a view to direct historical writing.

There are two kinds among novelists—one that is curious of the past, the other preoccupied with the present. Stevenson belonged to both ; yet perhaps principally his work is in the succession to Walter Scott. In so far as it deals with Scottish subjects, it shuns the present and goes back into a time when Scotland and England were as foreign to each other as Great Britain and the United States are to-day. *Kidnapped* and *Catriona*, and—to a lesser degree—*The Master of Ballantrae* are stories of Jacobite rebellion. In these works, Stevenson was under the disadvantage of doing what he knew that Scott had done better. But he knew also that Scott had never really been at home with Highland life ; and perhaps instinctively he went where the field was less powerfully preoccupied. Only one of his completed tales is laid in the Lowlands which he knew from childhood ; and even so, *The Pavilion on the Links* is a story of homeless men and of alien conspiracy. Nothing that happens in it arises out of normal Scottish life and character.

The truth is that Stevenson, for all his attachment to Scotland, was never really at home there ; perhaps he was never really at home in any civilised society of



Great Britain. Companionable he was, a lover of company ; not in the least a solitary ; gregarious rather, but only with his congeners. Artists of any kind were easily his friends ; he could interest himself vividly in the life of any man who had to make a living by his hands, especially if he were a craftsman loving his craft ; but the ordinary *bourgeois* with a settled occupation and a steady income filled him with repulsion. He liked the French and he liked their country with its friendly sunshine ; but the French way of life never stirred his imagination. He never found an actual present scene to fire his fancy until he became part of a society, in its very essence shifting and impermanent, on which the sun shone bountifully, and in which danger and hazard were always on the horizon. In *The Wrecker*, *The Ebb Tide* and *The Beach of Falesá* he is a novelist of contemporary life and of a society in which he had his place marked and established. But that was not yet even guessed at : and the way to it led through gloomy passages.

At Davos, life was greatly sweetened by the presence of John Addington Symonds, a congenial man of letters ; but it was hotel life, and already at Blair Atholl he had found hotel life intolerable ; things were not likely to be much better where the company consisted entirely of invalids engaged in the depressing routine of a cure. He wrote nothing in this winter except a couple of short essays, introspective as usual, concerning the effect of Alpine climate on the intelligence. But he recovered far enough to return to Scotland in summer, and again went with his parents to visit Highland scenery. At Pitlochry in the valley of the Tummel, enjoyment of the country life brought

back his power to write, and here he satisfied himself entirely with a fantastic tale in broad Scots—*Thrawn Janet*. It is matched by another, the story of *Tod Lapraik* inset in *Catriona*, and both are certainly wonderful pieces of virtuosity. Stevenson, while he was writing, contrived to make himself believe in witch and warlock, and possession by an unholy spirit of some human body. Thousands of folk had believed the like, in the times of which he had been reading, and he gave full rein to his imagination. This idea of two spirits in one body bred, it will be seen later, a work decisive for his fortunes; and meanwhile, one must note the excellence of the writing in *Thrawn Janet*. His study of the Covenanting literature stood to him, and at every turn his enjoyment of an idiom not hackneyed in journalism makes itself felt. He has the idiom of the mind no less than of the tongue; nothing could be better than this comment on Mr. Soulis the minister and “the feck o’ books he had wi’ him. They were books of divinity to be sure, or so they ca’d them; but the serious were of opinion there was little service for sae mony when the hale o’ God’s word would gang in the neuk o’ a plaid.”

More ambitious is the account of the witch woman as Mr. Soulis came on her washing clothes by a stream.

“He drew back a pickle, and he scanned her narrowly. She was tramp-trampin’ in the cla’es, croonin’ to hersel’; an’ eh! Gude guide us, but it was a fearsome face. Whiles she sang louder, but there was nae man born o’ woman that could tell the words o’ her song; an’ whiles she lookit side-long down, but there was naething for her to look at. There

gaed a scunner through the flesh upon his banes ; an' that was Heeven's advertisement."

Yet I should rate much higher another piece of fiction, written a month later, when he had moved from Pitlochry to Braemar. This was *The Merry Men*, which he described to Henley as a "fantasia of the sea". Long after he quoted it to his step-daughter as one of the cases in his work where the inanimate nature played a greater part than the human. Here, as in *The Pavilion on the Links*, a dangerous coast is described by one who had been specially taught to study such dangers. The little islet of Earraid, which served as a store base when the rock tower of Dhu Heartach was building by the Stevenson firm, must have left a deep impression on his mind, since here, and again in *Kidnapped*, he provided that sinister landscape with appropriate happenings. But in this case the human interest becomes secondary. "It's really a story of wrecks, as they appear to the dweller on the coast", he wrote to Henley. "It's a view of the sea."

Wrecks have two aspects, one moral, one pictorial. They bring to the people of a dangerous coast what has been always known for the most dreadful temptation, and in this case, on a lonely coast avoided by the ordinary track of ships, the temptation comes to a single household. Greed for strange unlooked-for plunder, flung up by the elements at his feet, tempts a sober religious-minded man into madness and even the madness of murder. That, if it were followed up, could be a grim study in psychology ; but Stevenson gives it the go-by. He only leads us to believe that murder has been done, not long before the scene opens,

and we are gradually made to see that madness has accompanied the murderous deed, making so complete a wreckage of the human soul that a harmonious close is only to be reached through reparation, which follows by an agency as fantastic as all else in the tale. But the essential purpose of the story neglects the moral issue to paint the distracting wildness of the forces which under certain combinations of land and water the sea can bring into play. Stevenson, describing the wrecking and its causes with a trained faculty, begins by sketching the island's hummocky knowes of heather and grassland, thickly strewn with huge boulders of granite :

Off the south-west end of Aros these blocks are very many, and much greater in size. Indeed, they must grow monstrously bigger out to sea, for there must be ten sea-miles of open water sown with them as thick as a country place with houses, some standing thirty feet above the tides, some covered, but all perilous to ships ; so that on a clear, westerly blowing day, I have counted, from the top of Aros, the great rollers breaking white and heavy over as many as six-and-forty buried reefs. But it is nearer inshore that the danger is worse ; for the tide, here running like a mill-race, makes a long belt of broken water—a Roost we call it—at the tail of the land. I have often been out there in a dead calm at the slack of the tide ; and a strange place it is, with the sea swirling and combing up and boiling like the cauldrons of a linn, and now and again a little dancing mutter of sound as though the Roost were talking to itself. But when the tide begins to run again, and above all in heavy weather, there is no man could take a boat within half a mile of it, nor a ship afloat that could either steer or live in such a place. You can hear the roaring of it six miles away. At the seaward end there comes the strongest of the bubble ; and it's here that these big breakers dance together—the dance of death, it may be called—that have got the name, in these parts, of

the Merry Men. I have heard it said that they run fifty feet high ; but that must be the green water only, for the spray runs twice as high as that. Whether they got the name from their movements, which are swift and antic, or from the shouting they make about the turn of the tide, so that all Aros shakes with it, is more than I can tell.

The truth is, that in a south-westerly wind that part of our archipelago is no better than a trap. If a ship got through the reefs, and weathered the Merry Men, it would be to come ashore on the south coast of Aros, in Sandag Bay, where so many dismal things befell our family, as I propose to tell. The thought of all these dangers, in the place I knew so long, makes me particularly welcome the works now going forward to set lights upon the headlands and buoys along the channels of our iron-bound, inhospitable islands.

An observant reader will feel that the last sentence I have quoted breaks for a moment the intensity of the effort to transmit a vision ; Stevenson was tempted away from his artistic purpose to salute in passing those labours of his own family whose progress he had watched from that limit of the land. This momentary lapse into the key of normal prose makes one all the more aware that the whole thing is in reality a poem ; it has the excitement proper to poetry, and is indeed far better poetry than most of what he wrote in verse. Yet in verse he could not have given what is characteristic of his map-loving mind—the minute description of the shore's contour with its sudden treacherous shelvings, which have their part to play in the tragic finale. All this is necessary groundwork for the high-strung passages which depict a demoniac frenzy of the elements. I give only a brief example :

Never before had I seen the Merry Men thus violent. The fury, height, and transiency of their spoutings was a

thing to be seen and not recounted. High over our heads on the cliff rose their white columns in the darkness ; and the same instant, like phantoms, they were gone. Sometimes three at a time would thus aspire and vanish ; sometimes a gust took them, and the spray would fall about us, heavy as a wave. And yet the spectacle was rather maddening in its levity than impressive by its force. Thought was beaten down by the confounding uproar ; a gleeful vacancy possessed the brains of men, a state akin to madness ; and I found myself at times following the dance of the Merry Men as it were a tune upon a jiggling instrument.

The tale itself, as a tale, limps somewhat : there is an imperfect welding together of the human story ; and to say truth, we are never really made to believe that the island's tenant had done a murder after some earlier wreck. Yet it would be difficult to exceed the power with which the sea tragedy that passes before the narrator's eye is led up to and described ; and on the whole this tale and *Thrawn Janet* marked a point of achievement that Stevenson had not reached before. He knew it, of course, and told Henley so ; and he wrote to Gosse : " I am now enjoying the first decently competent and peaceable weeks for close upon two years ; happy in a big brown moor behind and an incomparable burn by my side ; happy, above all, in some work—for at last I am at work with the appetite and confidence that alone makes work supportable ".

In short, as soon as health came back, even in some measure (for that same letter complained of a sleepy torpor), his faculty, now fully trained, issued in work adequate to his powers ; and it did not go unrecognised. *Cornhill* published *Thrawn Janet* in spite of its dialect, and published *The Merry Men* in spite of awkward length. But a man could not live by a few magazine articles and short stories, and though the work

of this year probably widened the circle of those who followed the new writer, no work of his had yet possessed the elements of a popular success. He and his wife were determined to exploit the vein of grim sensation which he had opened in *Thrawn Janet* and *The Merry Men*: they were to collaborate in "tales of Horror". There is a taste for whatever will make the flesh creep; Stevenson enjoyed the sensation, and as he says "frightened himself to death" with *Thrawn Janet*. Yet *The Merry Men* has not that effect; and madness is not a much pleasanter subject than literal possession by a devil. In short, the vein which had been struck was not likely to yield gold, nor to endear its owner to a wide public.

But before the new fit of creative energy was exhausted this tireless experimenter found almost by chance a new direction for his faculties; and this time gold was in sight—not in large quantities, but enough to meet the man's most ardent desire, which was to become self-supporting.

He had not taken up literature because it would be money-making; but plainly he considered that unless he could live by it, his duty was to find some other work which would be proved to meet a need because it would earn payment. In his chosen trade, he was not willing to turn out bad or slovenly work; but he certainly did not feel himself bound to attempt the highest flights—nor even the highest that seemed within his compass. Instinct prompted him to attempt something along the track which Scott had blazed; but when the chance came, he was well content to be a competitor with Mayne Reid or Ballantyne or Henty.

## CHAPTER VI

### TREASURE ISLAND

THE lucky turn in Stevenson's career presented itself when Master Lloyd Osbourne, aged thirteen, came back for his holidays to Braemar and demanded to be amused ; for the weather was wet and time must be spent indoors. Stevenson, always willing to play with boy or girl, took coloured chalk and paper and began drawing in competition along with the schoolboy. What he drew was the map of an island containing all the points that could endear it to a romantic mind or to a practical pirate. Across the map a name was written—"Treasure Island"—and then suddenly, as Stevenson pored over coast-line and harbours, the story began to grow. "Brown faces and bright weapons peeped out upon me", he wrote, "from unexpected quarters as they passed to and fro, fighting and hunting treasure, on these few square miles of a flat projection." The schoolboy had stipulated that there should be "no women"; and this suited an author who had no desire to write love passages under the Victorian conventions. So the writing went on, and chapter by chapter was read aloud to an audience in which Mr. Stevenson the elder was just as ardent a listener as the boy for whom it was specially designed.



Henley was told in an excited letter that "crawlers" (otherwise, the "tales of Horror") must wait; that the "new lay" promised to bring in more money than any amount of crawlers; and that some bookseller should be urged to find the best book about the buccaneers and "send it skimming by the fastest post". Only three chapters had then been written, but by the time eight were ready, Dr. Japp, an authority on Thoreau, arrived to continue some discussion arising from Stevenson's essay in *Cornhill*; he assisted in the family circle at the daily readings—which for his sake were begun all over again; and when he departed, he took the finished chapters with him for submission to *Young Folks*, a boys' paper. Mr. Henderson, the editor, accepted, and by October *Treasure Island* had begun to appear as a serial. Stevenson had begun a dozen novels, but never got beyond half-way; now, he was under a bond to complete the tale. But for this, *Treasure Island* also might have been thrown aside; half-way through, the vein gave out, and there was a dead check.

Those first fifteen chapters had all been composed with the same gusto; "no writing, just drive along as the words come and the pen will scratch"—so he described it to Henley. His father was not only a listener but a contributor of ideas; when the time came for Billy Bones' chest to be ransacked, the old engineer passed the better part of a day preparing, on the back of a legal envelope, an inventory of its contents—which was adopted without change. At one crucial point the story was beyond doubt indebted to him for a serviceable hint. The plans of John Silver and the other ex-pirates became known to the

cabin passengers, because Squire Trelawney, at whose cost the *Hispaniola* was chartered, pampered the crew so far as to provide a barrel of apples on deck for their eating. Jim Hawkins, the boy, foraging for an apple, found the barrel so near empty that he slipped into it, and was curled up there when John Silver and a couple of his comrades sat themselves down heavily against the cask, and began to talk. Now Stevenson describes in *The Records of a Family of Engineers* a certain Captain Souttar, master of the Lighthouse Board's vessel who ingratiated himself skilfully with Robert Stevenson, the engineer in chief; but Robert's sons had their own opinion of Captain Souttar, and Thomas Stevenson found it confirmed when he on a rainy night "crept into an apple barrel on deck and from this place of ambush overheard Souttar and a comrade discoursing in their oilskins". One would have liked to think that when the tale was being unfolded chapter by chapter, Thomas Stevenson suggested this detail. But it is clear that the story of Souttar had been familiar to Louis Stevenson from his childhood, and we must content ourselves with thinking how, when there was first mention of an apple barrel on board the *Hispaniola*, an old gentleman must have pricked up his ears.

After the first fifteen chapters came a break. So far, the story had been told by Jim Hawkins in person as the recital of what he actually did or saw done; the problem now was how to report things that were happening simultaneously in different places. The first chapters had been published before Stevenson knew how to get on; his health had broken again, and sent him back to Davos. There the lucky fit returned;

three or four chapters, in which the narrator is Dr. Livesey, brought events to the point at which Jim could again take up the story; and the whole was finished in another fortnight of ardent writing. About the craftsmanship, it is worth while to quote what the *Saturday Review* said on December 8th, 1883: "Like all Mr. Stevenson's good work, it is touched with genius. It is written in that crisp choice nervous English of which he has the secret—with such a union of measure and force as to be in its way a masterpiece of narration." That is discerning praise, the praise of a craftsman by a craftsman; but it does not take into account how great a variety of manners were at Stevenson's command. *The Merry Men* was written within the same month as the early chapters of *Treasure Island*, and written also at white heat; and one must admire the virtuosity of a writer who could match two subjects so different with so different manners.

But, good though it be, the writing in *Treasure Island* is only a secondary merit. The book is first and foremost that very rare thing, a really good piece of narrative fiction—not of the highest kind by any means, for that deals with passions that have a certain nobility; and the most to be said for pirates is that their proceedings have a certain picturesqueness. But since, beyond doubt, pirates existed, a story of pirate adventure is a fair subject for art, provided that over and above the merely exciting elements it shows us human nature. Stevenson so compounded his tale that the lawless desperadoes should be seen in company and in conflict with valiant and honourable men; but the success of his work lay in the inspiration which made him conceive as the leader of the pirate gang a

man of such ability that he could, when it suited his purpose, become a decent, orderly citizen, prudent in his affairs. It is a boys' book certainly ; when women are left out, problems of conduct are greatly simplified ; but any boy who reads it will learn, knowingly or not, a deal about the mastery of men. It is a boys' book, but in a tissue of highly coloured invention the whole action is determined by characters. Jim Hawkins is throughout an instrument of lucky chance ; he never controls the situation. The things that he does are done on a boyish impulse, though he does them courageously and competently, and by doing them gains valuable information for the chiefs of the expedition. But at one point, after his vagrant activities appear to have been crowned with triumph, he blunders into the hands of the pirates and is only saved because John Silver, the pirate leader, recognising that the game is lost, sees a chance to make terms for himself by saving the boy. That scene in which Silver, by a mixture of cunning and audacity, establishes his authority over angry ruffians who want to wring the boy's neck for thwarting their plans is really the centre of the book. What follows rises in key, as it should in a tale of violence, up to the final discharge of weapons over the rifled hiding-place ; but, as the *Saturday Review* saw, the real hero of the book is John Silver, and it is in that conflict of wills that Silver saves the life of Jim Hawkins and his own.

Among the lesser merits of the book are the opening studies of ruffians ; first of them, Billy Bones, Flint's second in command, who after Flint's death had got away from the rest of the crew with the chart and map which showed where Flint's booty was hidden.

The story begins with his arrival at an out-of-the-way public-house on the South coast kept by the parents of Jim Hawkins. Here we have the truculent rum-sodden sea-dog terrifying the neighbourhood, but, as the boy soon learns, in terror of a visit from other "seafaring men". Soon the visitors arrive; the first of them is driven away by the Captain and his cutlass; but then comes the sinister figure of a blind man, tapping his way with a stick, and seizing the boy's arm with a savage cruelty. Stevenson has contrived to get into that page a concentration of evil malignant cunning that is bold as a weasel when it strikes. The "black spot" is passed; the Captain, suddenly congested with fury and with rum, falls dead in an apoplexy. Jim and his mother search the dead man's chest that she may get the money owing to her, till the sound of men coming hurries them away and Jim picks up a canvas packet which lay under the coins. While the furious crew are ransacking the house, revenue officers who have been warned arrive; the blind man is ridden down and Jim Hawkins is carried off to tell his tale to the Squire and the doctor, both of them adventurous men who have seen foreign seas. Immediately a plan is formed; the Squire will charter a vessel and Jim Hawkins shall go as cabin boy.

Weeks have passed before Jim reaches Bristol; Squire and doctor are there, the vessel is chartered and Jim is sent out to make acquaintance with a one-legged man whom the Squire has secured for sea cook. That is how John Silver comes into the story; and a first touch of suspicion is aroused when Jim recognises "Black Dog", the emissary whom Captain Bones routed, slinking out of Silver's public-house. The

captain who is to command the *Hispaniola* almost throws up his command — because he has been engaged to sail the vessel to an unnamed destination and finds that already all the crew know that it is a hunt for Flint's treasure. But all goes well till the voyage is almost completed ; and it is then that Jim Hawkins in his apple barrel hears the talk of John Silver and a couple of the crew.

When the island is sighted, and the vessel brought into its harbour, the captain advises letting the men go on shore — thus dividing their forces. The scent of gold is in their nostrils and they rush for the boats ; Jim Hawkins, eager as a boy would be to see the strange land, slips in with them, and once ashore gets away by himself to explore. But soon he hears Silver in talk with one of the crew who had not belonged to the pirate ship and has still to be over-persuaded — or despatched. He resists ; and the killing which follows has never in fifty years gone out of my mind. Most of the story had slipped from my memory ; but not the blind man's evil presence, nor his death under the trampling feet of horses ; still less the swift terrible action of the crippled man who hurls his crutch like a spear at the retreating sailor, catching him full in the back ; and then with a one-legged leap is on the body and drives a knife home again and again. Nothing could be better imagined to convey the formidable nature of this treacherous ruffian who can make his very disability at once a trap and an engine to slay.

Certainly this is not the highest kind of imagination, but it is powerful as a Daumier picture ; we see and we hear the pant that accompanies the murderer's leap and the stab. The same quality lasts through the

story; Stevenson lived the adventure, and wherever it took him, a map of the country was present to his mind. Almost without exception, too, he preserves the key of his style, avoiding words or turns of thought which are not dramatically appropriate to an intelligent boy. An exception comes as the story approaches its climax, when Jim Hawkins, towed on a rope by Silver, accompanies the mutineers on their way to the cache—to which they have now the map for a guide. A "Tall Tree" is the final indication, and as they scramble over wooded hills, at last one huge pine towers above all: "a giant of a vegetable, with a red column as big as a cottage, and a wide shadow around it in which a company could have manœuvred". Now "giant of a vegetable" is the expression of a trained seeker after words that shall give a shock of surprise; this is the author of *Virginibus Puerisque* speaking, and not Jim Hawkins; and alliteration tempted him to "column" instead of trunk, because he wanted to say that a company could have manœuvred in the shadow. Stevenson had become so excited by his own narrative that he forgot Jim Hawkins for the moment and wrote as he might have written to Gosse or any sympathetic man of letters. For indeed just here there is more than a boy's mind in the observation of Silver, made drunk for a moment in spite of his wariness by the possible presence of some huge mass of gold. Still it would be tedious to insist on exact verisimilitude; and an intelligent boy might have noticed, as Hawkins does, Silver's instant rallying of his faculties when he and the others stand before an already ransacked pit. In the surprise of the ambush that follows, he alone is braced for action, and it comes

characteristically when he fires his pistol into the body of one fellow who had attempted revolt against his rule. There is a touch of genuine irony too when he recognises the real agent of his defeat—Ben Gunn, the half-imbecile seaman whom other pirates had marooned on this island three years before : “ Ah, Ben Gunn, to think as how you’ve done me ! ”

Stevenson himself has admitted in an essay which describes the genesis of *Treasure Island*, that three or four important details were borrowed, though unconsciously, from other writers, including even the pirate chanty, “ Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum ! ” If a man can borrow to such good purpose, he needs no more excuse ; and of course the whole of this book is constructed out of materials supplied by other books. But there is this to be noted. It is a sea-faring story ; he himself was then only a longshore boatsman and very wisely he kept virtually all the action, even when it passed aboard ship, somewhere close to the shore. There he could trust himself ; he knew what a seaman would look for in a harbour, and in his imaginary map he had visualised all the currents and the depths of water in the cove which the *Hispaniola* first enters, and in the other to which Jim, after he has set her adrift, brings her with the help of a seaman whose chief aim is to cut his throat. In short, in this piece of happy invention, conceived almost as a game, Stevenson utilises all his resources—all that he had read and all that he had observed. Much of it seems to be work of sheer fancy ; but wherever fancy can be solidly buttressed up with fact, he props and pins the structure. Perhaps the secret of its success is that it was in the last resort a piece of play rather than a piece of work.



He went at it as a good player goes into a game of Rugby football, with all his faculties jubilantly at stretch.

*Treasure Island* made him a popular author. He had reputation already as a writer among the circles that love letters ; yet he called his account of *Treasure Island*, " My First Book ". It was, he began by admitting, by no means the first ; but it was the first by which he became known to a wide public, so much interested that a magazine asked him to tell the world exactly how he had happened to do it. Yet when it began to appear in *Young Folks*, comments such as readers of that journal were accustomed to send were by no means enthusiastic. The serial publication ran from October 1881 to January 1882 ; and presumably Stevenson's intimates read it there ; letters assume that Gosse and Henley were taking in *Young Folks*. But it was not till May 5th, 1883—more than a year after *Young Folks* was done with—that he wrote rapturously to his parents of Cassell's magnificent offer for the book rights : " A hundred pounds all alive, O ! A hundred jingling, tingling golden minted quid ! Is not that wonderful ? " This was of course only an advance on royalties, but at this period, if Stevenson saw his way to a hundred pounds for a complete book, he was more than content.

It came out very late in the year : the *Saturday* reviewed it in December, with a promptitude which suggests that the reviewer had either read or heard of the story in advance ; for the *Spectator* had nothing to say about it till March 1884, and then the notice was not serious criticism but one huge chuckle of delight, because some really serious person, no common novel

reader, but the head "of a great manufacturing concern", had refused to put the book down when his family summoned him to lunch. By that time many and many a one, persons of importance and persons of no importance, had found the same unwillingness to be stopped in their first reading. Certainly one who was then an undergraduate of Brasenose College will never forget how, having taken the book to read in his second floor bedroom, looking into the branches of Heber's chestnut tree, he was obliged, somewhere in the chilly small hours, to rise up and hunt for a fresh candle (those days not being pampered with electric light) and found himself quivering with excitement from head to foot. Many and many a score of novels that same reader has read in the same way from cover to cover, pursuing the same bad habit; but none of them all has left any comparable memory of possession by the grip of a tale.

After the publication of *Treasure Island* in its book form, Stevenson was no longer of interest only to the amateurs of *belles lettres*; a wide general public was on the watch for his future work. In short, he had succeeded; but since this is the romantic history of a writer who achieved his purpose against great difficulties, one must measure carefully how far he had advanced. Success for him was not the cataclysmic experience that has come in late years to perhaps a dozen writers—some good, some not quite that. The sales, according to Graham Balfour, were only 5600 in the first twelve months; and in the United States at that time English copyright could be freely pillaged. But if *Treasure Island* was not a gold mine, it gave him the assurance he needed that henceforward he could

pay his own way, support his wife and family by his own exertions. His aim in life was to be a writer; but in his view of things the artist did not justify his existence simply by producing work that satisfied himself. It must satisfy others and prove their satisfaction by bringing in as much return as would keep the artist from starvation; and if he had a family, then his family also must be provided for. To attain this modest ambition, he was not willing to lower the quality of his work; but he was perfectly ready to look for the kind of work which would sell.

Moreover, while it still seemed unlikely that the kind of writing by which he had earned appreciable reputation would bring him a competence, he grasped at another chance. In the summer of 1881, at the very time when he was writing *Thrawn Janet* and *The Merry Men*, the chair of History in Edinburgh University fell vacant; the power to elect rested with the body of Advocates; and he decided to become a candidate—not so unreasonably as it may now seem, for the principal work which he had then in mind was to be a study of Scotland in the eighteenth century. Leslie Stephen, no mean authority, was among those who backed him with a testimonial; and if it is not surprising that by December he “had joined the band of the rejected”, he was in very decent company; Hamerton, to whom he wrote this phrase, had been rejected for the Chair of Fine Arts. Whatever Hamerton might have done, whatever Stevenson might have done as professor, if chosen, they would at least have been interesting. It would not have been the work of Stevenson’s choice, but he would have done it with a will. For the sake of independence he was

ready to jump at work not of his choice ; nor did he think the less of himself for that willingness. Bread-winning came first—provided it were by honest work : he was never pontifical about his own talent. In the same way, once *Treasure Island* (then called *The Sea Cook*) was accepted for *Young Folks* and seemed likely to be a bread-winner, he wrote to Henley : “ I’ll make the boys’ book business pay ; but I have to make a beginning. This first is only an experiment . . . wait till you see what I can make ’em with my hand in. I’ll be the Harrison Ainsworth of the future ; and a chalk better by St. Christopher ; or at least as good.”

It seems that he had to encounter one serious opposition before he entered on this rivalry with a popular writer of boys’ books ; for in February 1882 he wrote to Colvin : “ F. [his wife] has re-read *Treasure Id.*, against which she protested ; and now she thinks the end about as good as the beginning”. Her opinion had been evidently (like Henley’s) that he should stick to the vein of *Thrawn Janet* and *The Merry Men*—work of a graver imagination. Nor did she withdraw her disapproval, when he decided to meet Mr. Henderson’s demand for another book planned for a public of “ Young Folks”. But in the long interval (two years is a long time to the short of cash) between the finishing of *Treasure Island* and its unexpected vogue in book form, he let no chance of earning slip, and wrote a tale of England in the time of King Henry the Sixth. “ Tushery ” he called it in a letter to Henley. “ *The Black Arrow : A Tale of Tunstall Forest* is his name : tush ! a poor thing.” But *Young Folks* approved of it. “ In the eyes of

readers who thought less than nothing of *Treasure Island*, *The Black Arrow* was supposed to mark a clear advance. . . . Those who read volumes and those who read story-papers belong to different worlds. The verdict on *Treasure Island* was reversed in the other court; I wonder, will it be the same with its successor? ” So he wrote in the Dedication when *The Black Arrow* made its appearance in book form, and shared in a popularity earned by work of very different merit. The only thing in that volume to which every lover of Stevenson can turn with satisfaction is the opening of that dedication :

CRITIC ON THE HEARTH,

No one but myself knows what I have suffered, nor what my books have gained, by your unsleeping watchfulness and admirable pertinacity. And now here is a volume that goes into the world and lacks your *imprimatur*; a strange thing in our joint lives; and the reason of it stranger still! I have watched with interest, with pain, and at length with amusement, your unavailing attempts to peruse *The Black Arrow*; and I think I should lack humour indeed, if I let the occasion slip and did not place your name on the fly-leaf of the only book of mine that you have never read — and never will read.

We must praise the virtue of a needy writer's wife who set her face so resolutely against whatever she thought would be merely a pot-boiler; but to understand Stevenson, it is necessary to recognise that in order to avoid continual dependence on support from his father, he deliberately set himself down to pot-boiling by “tushery”. Many writers of much less artistic merit would have rejected the idea—more specially if subsidies could be counted on; but to Stevenson the feeling of constant indebtedness was

worse than toothache ; if he had to tush for a living, he would " tush it " like Harrison Ainsworth—or like Scott. He never forgot Sir Walter, and he knew the popularity of *Ivanhoe*. Artistic conscience in him condemned tushery, that is clear enough ; but the other kind of conscience told him not to reject a chance of bread-winning by a piece of work that went against the grain.

If Stevenson were not such an exemplary artist, there would be no need to comment on this lapse from austere standards ; a portrait painter accepts a commission to paint an uncongenial subject, does his best with the job, and no more has to be said about it. *The Black Arrow* was a thing in its way honestly done ; innumerable reprints prove that it has had a certain value for a certain class of readers ; but Stevenson himself knew very well that there was not in it one tithe of the genial invention which created *Treasure Island*. Why then did he do it ? The answer has to be biographical.

During the winter of 1881-82, he was again at Davos, and the power of work which had returned to him in the previous summer was in some measure continued. He finished *Treasure Island*, wrote *The Silverado Squatters* and several articles including his *Talk and Talkers* and *A Gossip on Romance*. In March 1882, Chatto & Windus brought out a volume of his essays under the general title *Familiar Studies of Men and Books* ; they also published in book form his *New Arabian Nights* which went into a second edition. Over and above all this, he was writing between-whiles the verses which were ultimately to appear as *A Child's Garden of Verses* (for the moment

they were known as *Penny Whistles*). By June he was back again in Scotland, and with the early autumn his lung trouble had returned. Davos could keep him alive while he stayed there, but he did not find life well worth living at Davos ; his wife could not stand the cold and high altitude ; so it was determined, in a lucky hour, to try what the South of France could do for him.

The start was not lucky. Leaving Mrs. Stevenson, who was not yet recovered from the effects of Davos, he set out with his cousin to reconnoitre about Montpellier ; but there chest-trouble returned ; he went on to Marseilles, where his wife joined him, and they found what seemed to be a perfect abode just outside the city. But here also hopes were cheats ; both got ill from bad drainage ; and it was February before they found at last what they wanted, the Châlet La Solitude above the old town of Hyères. Here for the first time the vagrant, sick of vagrancy, began to taste the pleasures of a householder ; here he stayed from March of 1883 to July 1884 ; here it was that the report of a solid success first reached him when *Treasure Island* appeared ; and here also he wrote his pot-boiler.

*The Black Arrow* was the only book begun and completed at Hyères, but it represented only a small part of his energies. He was finishing off *The Silverado Squatters*, to be published first (in abridged form) by the *Century Magazine* and then as a book by Chatto & Windus ; he was writing for the *Magazine of Art* his article on San Francisco, *A Modern Cosmopolis* ; and he was condensing the impressions of his emigrant train journey *Across the Plains* for a new publication,

*Longman's Magazine*, which wanted all the work it could get from him. His *Gossip on Romance* had appeared there ; so had a short story, *The Treasure of Franchard*, written between bouts of illness since he came to France. *Penny Whistles* made an occupation for the times when he could not sit at a desk ; but over and above all these was the constant effort to complete the thing to which his highest hopes were pinned—the long meditated story of *Prince Otto*.

Effort was constant with him, so far as health permitted, but never continuous. Writing, not to one of his literary friends (for whom he would have thought such exposition tedious), but to Mr. Dick the confidential clerk of his family's firm, he explained his fashion of work :

It is my theory that work is highly beneficial ; but that it should, if possible, and certainly for such partially broken down instruments as the thing I call my body, be taken in batches, with a clear break and breathing space between. I always do vary my work, laying one thing aside to take up another, not merely because I believe it rests the brain, but because I have found it most beneficial to the result. Reading, Bacon says, makes a full man ; but what makes me full on any subject is to banish it for a time from all my thoughts.

But that letter was written in March 1884, at the end of this Hyères period when, as he begins by admitting, he had "overworked to get a piece of work finished before he had his holiday, thinking to enjoy it the more" ; and instead of that the "machinery near hand came sundry" in his hands. So he proposed "out of every quarter to work two months and rest the third"—instead of the previous distribution which had generally resulted in "four months impotent



illness, and two of imperfect health, one before, one after, I break down ”.

Here then is what it comes down to. He had two objects—one, that of every artist, to do something bigger and better than he had yet accomplished, and this object he knew well to be by its nature never completely attainable. But the other was limited and moderate ; and now with the steadily growing demand for his work, it did seem as if by following his vocation he might manage to pay his way. The nearer this limited end seemed of attainment, the more eagerly he grasped at it ; and that, I think, is why he did his pot-boiler. For although health, or something like it, had come to him with happiness, it was a precarious holding ; and while the power to work was with him, he rushed those parts of his work which were done, quite frankly, for pay. All the writing up of his American experiences, all the rearrangement of old drafts and notes about the train journey and San Francisco and Silverado, was a business that had to be driven through ; he had good material to work on, and the manipulation of it was done conscientiously, though without the jolly mood that had inspired him when he wrote of his *Inland Voyage* and his *Travels with a Donkey*. *Penny Whistles* was good to play with ; and before he was yet settled in at Hyères he was writing projects to Henley for the make-up of a volume that should please his fastidious taste in print and about the choice of an illustrator. As to *The Black Arrow*, from the time that it was planned he seems to have ploughed straight ahead with it, and indeed he had to ; for the serial publication began in June. But all these things were the changes necessary to rest his

mind for its principal work, in which this time he hoped to launch a masterpiece.

"My head is singing with Otto", he wrote to Henley from Hyères in April; the first month in his new abode had been wholly given to it.

For the first two weeks I wrote and revised and only finished four chapters: last week, I have just drafted straight ahead, and I have just finished Chapter XI. It will want a heap of oversight and much will not stand, but the pace is good. . . . At the same rate, the draft should be finished in ten days more; and then I shall have the pleasure of beginning again at the beginning. Ah damned job! I have no idea whether or not Otto will be good. It is all pitched pretty high and stilted. . . . I sometimes feel very weary; but the thing travels—and I like it when I am at it.

A month later came the news that a hundred pounds had been offered for *Treasure Island*. "Add to that", he wrote to his people, "that I have now finished in draft the fifteenth chapter of my novel, and have only five before me, and you will see what causes of gratitude I have. . . . My child's verse book is finished, dedication and all, and out of my hands; *Silverado* is done, too, and cast upon the waters; and this novel so near completion, it does look as if I should support myself without trouble in the future. If I have only health, I can, I thank God. It is dreadful to be a great, big man, and not be able to buy bread."

That is one side of the man—or of the Scotsman: certainly not less a man for being a Scot; and it seems, to judge from indications in the letters, that the pot-boiler was undertaken within the next few days. But we get another side of the same gentleman—the artist side—in a letter to Henley, all written the same month,

while *The Black Arrow* was being sped on its course :  
“ A word in your ear : I don’t like trying to support myself. I hate the strain and the anxiety ; and when unexpected expenses are foisted on me, I feel the world is playing with false dice.—Now I must ‘Tush, adieu.”  
There followed “ A lytle Jape of TUSHERIE. By A. Tusher.” Here is part of it :

The filthy gutter slushes,  
The clouds are full of rain,  
But doomed is he who tushes  
To tush and tush again  
  
At morn with his hair-brushes,  
Still ‘ tush ’ he says, and weeps ;  
At night again he tushes,  
And tushes till he sleeps.  
  
And when at length he pushes  
Beyond the river dark —  
‘ Las, to the man who tushes,  
‘ Tush ’ shall be God’s remark !

If the letter of thankfulness to his parents was the self-respecting Scotsman’s *cri du cœur*, this surely is the cry of an artist’s heart, when the Scotsman set him down to boil the pot by tushery. But the artist comes uppermost in the long run, and the completed expression of him is given in a letter to Henley, written while tushery was in full swing, but health was on the mend and confidence was coming back with it.

I beg to inform you that I, Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Brashiana* and other works, am merely beginning to commence to prepare to make a first start at trying to understand my profession. O the height and depth of novelty and worth in any art ! and O that I am privileged to swim and shoulder through such oceans ! Could one get out of sight of land—all in the blue ! Alas not, being anchored here in flesh, and the bonds of logic being still about us.

But what a great space and a great air there is in these small shallows where alone we venture! and how new each sight, squall, calm, or sunrise! An art is a fine fortune, a palace in a park, a band of music, health, and physical beauty; all but love—to any worthy practiser. I sleep upon my art for a pillow; I waken in my art; I am unready for death, because I hate to leave it. I love my wife, I do not know how much, nor can, nor shall, unless I lost her; but while I can conceive my being widowed, I refuse the offering of life without my art. I *am* not but in my art; it is me; I am the body of it merely.

And yet I produce nothing, am the author of *Brashiana* and other works: tiddy-iddity—as if the works one wrote were anything but “prentice’s experiments”. Dear reader, I deceive you with husks, the real works and all the pleasure are still mine and incommunicable. After this break in my work, beginning to return to it, as from light sleep, I wax exclamatory, as you see.

Sursum Corda:

Heave ahead:

Here’s luck.

Art and Blue Heaven,

April and God’s Larks.

Green reeds and the sky-scattering river.

A stately music.

Enter God.

R. L. S.

Ay, but you know, until a man can write that “Enter God”, he has made no art! None! Come, let us take counsel together and make some!

Another to Gosse in September of the same year sums up the situation—from the Scotsman’s outlook:

This year, for the first time, I shall pass £300; I may even get halfway to the next milestone. This seems but a faint remuneration; and the devil of it is, that I *manage*, with sickness, and moves, and education, and the like, to keep steadily in front of my income. However, I console myself with this, that if I were anything else under God’s

heaven, and had the same crank health, I should make an even zero. If I had, with my present knowledge, twelve months of my old health, I would, could, and should do something neat. As it is, I have to tinker at my things in little sittings; and the rent, or the butcher, or something, is always calling me off to rattle up a pot-boiler. And then comes a back-set of my health, and I have to twiddle my fingers and play patience.

In fact, when New Year's Day came he reported to his people "a total receipt of £465 : 0 : 6 for the last twelve months; £250 due next month, £50 in the bank, and owing no man nothing. . . . When I think of how last year began, after four months of sickness and idleness, all my plans gone to water, myself starting alone, a kind of spectre, for Nice—should I not be grateful? Come, let us sing unto the Lord."

Only a week later, Henley and another friend, Charles Baxter, paid him a visit; he accompanied them as far as Nice and then went down with congestion of the lungs and kidneys and did not seem likely to get up again. But once again his constitution "of whipcord and thorn switches" proved its toughness, and by the 9th of March he was writing to Colvin about *Prince Otto* :

Two chapters do remain; one to rewrite, one to create; and I am not yet able to tackle them. For me it is my chief o' works; hence probably not so for others, since it only means that I have here attacked the greatest difficulties. . . . As like as not, the effort will be more obvious than the success.

And again to Gosse, on the same subject :

I have worked very hard at it, and so do not expect any great public favour. *In moments of effort, one learns to do the easy things that people like.* There is the golden maxim; thus one should strain and then play, strain again and play

again. The strain is for us, it educates ; the play is for the reader, and pleases. Do you not feel so ? We are ever threatened by two contrary faults : both deadly. To sink into what my forefathers would have called "rank conformity", and to pour forth cheap replicas, upon the one hand ; upon the other, and still more insidiously present, to forget that art is a diversion and a decoration, that no triumph or effort is of value, nor anything worth reaching except charm.

These meditations of a writer on the art of writing abound at this period when he was too weak for actual work ; and they are full of profit and of rare felicities ; for instance, what he wrote to his father : " Those who avoid (or seek to avoid) Scott's facility are apt to be continually straining and torturing their style to get in more of life. And to many the extra significance does not redeem the strain." Nobody is likely to put the case against Stevenson better than he has done it himself here.

Again he writes to Henley :

My view of life is essentially the comic ; and the romantically comic. *As You Like It* is to me the most bird-haunted spot in letters (hear that phrase) ; *Tempest* and *Twelfth Night* follow. These are what I mean by poetry and nature.

Then he calls up Musset's *Carmosine* and *Fantasio* ; Meredith's Evan and Rose, Harry Richmond in Germany :

To me these things are the good ; beauty touched with sex and laughter ; beauty with God's earth for the background. Tragedy does not seem to me to come off ; and when it does, it does so by the heroic illusion ; the anti-masque has been omitted ; laughter, which attends on all our steps in life, and sits by the deathbed, and certainly redacts the epitaph, laughter has been lost from these great-hearted lies.

It would be mere stupidity to think that this was written consciously with a thought that it should be published some day—though much that he wrote for print was less worth publication. But just as there are many painters who grow restless when they have not brush in hand and canvas before them, so this man, devoted to his craft of writing, but too weak for the effort of continuous creation, could not keep himself, when he had pen in his fingers and a sympathetic correspondent, from shaping his thought in words that pleased his mind and his ear.

Things grew worse, however ; his sight was affected ; his lungs were constantly threatened with a hæmorrhage ; and on the reputation of some new doctor his wife persuaded him to move to Royat in the Auvergne. From there he wrote in July 1884 : " My life dwindles into a kind of valley-of-the-shadow picnic. I cannot read ; so much of the time (as to-day) I must not speak above my breath that to play patience, or to see my wife playing it, is become the be-all and end-all of my dim career. . . . Do not think me unhappy ; I have not been so for years ; but I am blurred, inhabit the debatable frontier of sleep, and have but dim designs upon activity. All is at a standstill : books closed, paper put aside, the voice, the eternal voice of R.L.S., well silenced. Hence this plaint reaches you with no very great meaning, no very great purpose, and written part in slumber by a heavy, dull, somnolent, superannuated son of a bedpost."

In this condition the successful author of *Treasure Island*—that excellent example of work done as play—came home to England and his friends.

## CHAPTER VII

### JEKYLL AND HYDE

WHEN a writer has for the first time made a strong mark on public attention, it is important, at least for his immediate interest, that his next published work shall deepen the impression. But Stevenson's nature was too capricious to arrange his efforts in the light of such prudence, and in this year 1885 he seemed bent on confusing his admirers. His mind was like a room having many windows on all sides of it, and he was continually dragging us to look at a new aspect of the world. If one counts up the things which he began in this year, the things which he finished for publication, and those which in the course of it he actually carried through, the activity has something feverish.

It was in fact unhealthy. Doctors had ordained that he must live strictly the life of an invalid ; Bournemouth proved suitable both for him and his wife, and his father bought in January the house to which a name was given associating it with the family's achievements ; for Skerryvore was the most famous of all the lighthouses. At " Skerryvore " he was in reach of his friends and had many visitors ; yet for a man so restless and stirring, every day of confinement to the house or to a few short-measured walks is a long day



to put in. Success had stimulated all his inner energies and the only recreation which tempted him was a change of work, from one way of writing to another.

Money necessities were less urgent, though his earnings still can barely have covered his expenses ; Graham Balfour says that they still averaged something under £400 a year. But he was driven by another impulse, or by another and more ambitious aspect of the same. Very deep in him lay the honourable feeling that every man owes a debt to the world ; and if his first concern had been to deliver himself from dependence on others for his family's daily bread, there followed immediately an honourable desire to be more than merely a bread-winner ; he wanted to do good. Now that he had won the world's attention by giving it pleasure with a straightforward story, he gave free rein to an instinct that was always with him ; he used his privilege as a story-teller to preach. In the result, after a year of baffling disappointments, his work was incomparably deepened and strengthened. The new bolt had gone home.

I must try now to track out the series of his manifold endeavours during this early period of his life at Bournemouth ; and the first of them has very little importance in his career. Just at the moment when Stevenson reached London, one of the side activities to which he had been tempted had its chance of yielding results. Henley had long believed that they could collaborate successfully in plays, and both men were well aware that plays, if they succeeded, paid far better than books. But at the time it was generally believed in England that talent for any other sort of writing was a disqualification for stage-craft. Wilde, a few years later,

did something to abolish the illusion by brilliancy of dialogue ; but it was left for Barrie to open the way which Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett and Priestley have followed so triumphantly. Stevenson and Henley most certainly did not succeed. *Deacon Brodie*, the first of their attempts (dealing with the career of a respected Edinburgh cabinet-maker who practised burglary outside his regular working hours) scarcely even attained to a *succès d'estime* ; it was played by a travelling company in Scotland and the north of England, and now in July 1884 had a matinée at the Prince's Theatre, to which Stevenson's admirers and Henley's went expectantly ; but they came away disappointed. Few men have been better able to visualise imaginary actions than Stevenson, and he could build up a dialogue finely ; but he was in essence a descriptive writer, and much special concentration would have been needed before he could employ a technique in which description must be dispensed with. He had been a playgoer like everyone else, and a keenly interested playgoer ; but there is no evidence that he ever sat in a theatre asking himself how the thing was done. Further, in the years while he was learning to be a novelist—studying most attentively how other writers attained their effects in print—his way of life put theatre-going out of the question ; consequently, he never tried this way of writing on his own initiative, though he was too enterprising and too companionable not to lend a hand when Henley came forward with a scheme. For, unlike the majority of capable workers, Stevenson loved collaborating ; and even in the work that was most completely his own, he sought the collaboration of criticism, reading

aloud what he had written while it was still in the rough, and often altering, even to the point of tearing up and beginning again.

It is true that any new way of work offered the pleasure of experiment; and probably this rather than the hope of a gold mine accounts for his tentative incursions into drama. But the man's activity was so multifarious that a change of occupation was always at hand. Even while he knew clearly that his main business was prose fiction, he continued to be essayist, moralist, critic and writer of verses; history had not yet completely dropped out of his view; there was little room in him for a dramatist. However *Deacon Brodie's* actual appearance on the boards was a keen stimulus; and now that Stevenson had come back to England, Henley, his collaborator, was at hand, and the two men delighted in putting their brains to work in company. Bournemouth was easily accessible; and by October two plays, *Beau Austin* and *Admiral Guinea*, were ready at least to be printed.

Add to this that in the course of 1884 he wrote half a dozen magazine articles, varying from a discourse on *The Character of Dogs* to a *Humble Remonstrance* against an essay in which Henry James had seemed to undervalue the importance of a story in fiction; and it becomes a little surprising that he should have found leisure of mind to contemplate a life of the Duke of Wellington. The suggestion came from Andrew Lang, who was then editing a series of "English Worthies". Lang thought *Treasure Island* the best story he had ever read except *Tom Sawyer* and *The Odyssey*; he delighted in Stevenson's company and knew his passionate interest in military history; he

knew also that Stevenson, besides his admiration for the great soldier (and for Tennyson's Ode on him) enjoyed vastly the Duke's conduct of his love affairs. Whether Stevenson or anybody could have done all that Stevenson would have wished to do within the limits of a small volume, and of the traditional proprieties, may be doubted, but the book was actually commissioned; it remains a curious item in the immense list of things which Stevenson projected doing.

No book by him appeared in 1884; the first successor to *Treasure Island* was *A Child's Garden of Verses*, published in March 1885. The *Penny Whistles*, as he first called them, had been accumulating during four years, and they proved acceptable to many who thought them exactly what children ought to like. I have not known many children who shared that opinion, but often repeated editions testify to their popularity. Like them or not, no one can find in them more than one facet of Stevenson's mind; the whole man was not there. About the time when these verses were published, he embarked on an attempt which was naturally indicated, to follow up *Treasure Island* with another story of adventure. A tale called *The Great North Road* was carried through eight chapters; then, abandoning highwaymen for Highlanders, he began *Kidnapped*. But when he had written the opening chapters which are a prologue to the story proper, after his usual fashion he laid the thing aside and did not return to it for several months.

Meanwhile there appeared (in May) another work carried out in collaboration; Mrs. Stevenson was part author of *More New Arabian Nights*. These have

not the gaiety of the first series which at least convey the feeling that a clever young man had found it great fun to write them ; indeed, this new set were in reality not at all light-hearted. Ireland was in those days much, and most unpleasantly, in the news ; the land war produced a grim tale of horrors ; in England Irish dynamiters were at work, and put Stevenson into " a mad fury " :

Damn O'Donovan Rossa ; damn him behind and before, above, below, and roundabout ; damn, deracinate, and destroy him, root and branch, self and company, world without end. Amen. I write that for sport if you like, but I will pray in earnest, O Lord, if you cannot convert, kindly delete him !

Stevenson was too little a citizen to be much of a politician ; but on occasion he could be powerfully affected by public events and by admiration or dislike of public personalities. Few persons were then indifferent about Mr. Gladstone, and Stevenson had been nurtured in vehement dislike of that statesman. Reading of Highland history had made him realise that England's action in Ireland had been oppressive ; but this did not reconcile him to Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy of what he considered as concessions to political crime. And when political crime took the form of dynamite outrages, Stevenson's reactions were violent. With his usual fairness he was at once aware that the English had been singularly lenient in their judgment of political crimes committed abroad ; but that did not lessen his detestation of actions which sacrificed the lives of innocent people in a street—often women and children. All this righteous indignation reached fever-heat when Mr. Gladstone (as Stevenson saw it),

left the heroic figure of Gordon to perish in Khartoum ; and the result was that he decided to hit back at the Irish, whom he regarded as Mr. Gladstone's allies. The method that he thought most effective was satire ; *The Dynamiters* was intended to make O'Donovan Rossa's agents contemptible, disgusting and ridiculous. His shafts miscarried ; I do not think they even made anyone angry ; but it is characteristic of the man that for a public purpose he sent out work under his name without caring for the effect on his literary reputation ; since he was too acute a judge of his own productions not to have known how far this book was inferior to anything that he had yet published.

But at this very time there was at last appearing the result of his longest effort, in which (though with many sinkings of heart) his highest hopes were centred. *Prince Otto* came out in *Longman's Magazine*, and by some instinctive sympathy those of us who were watching his career with ardour understood how much the book meant to its author. I remember well projecting a letter which should tell Stevenson of the delight that its monthly instalments gave, not to me (for that was of no consequence) but to my father, a veteran scholar of much distinction and of very wide reading. Sorry I was not to have written, years afterwards, when I learnt that the magazine's readers at large had been by no means pleased with the story, and that words of appreciation would have been welcome ; and sorry I am now to admit that the general public was right. But it proves how strong was the attraction which Stevenson exercised that my father, who read with avidity every other one of the greater English novelists but could never read Meredith,

should have been captured by a piece of work which shows Meredith's influence from the first chapter to the last.

Of course the writing was brilliant—a little too brilliant ; it draws attention to itself a shade too much, as indeed Meredith's does also. Any lover of Stevenson can re-read it with pleasure, for there is characteristic expression of Stevenson's mind on every page. But the trouble is that though we find Stevenson everywhere, the characters are not there ; they have no solidity. Witty things, wise things, or fine things may be put into their mouths but they do not come out of a human substance. In a word, there is excellent writing, but no creation. Now, whatever John Silver says comes out of John Silver, and whatever John Silver does expresses John Silver ; that is solid invention. But there is no more solidity of invention behind Prince Otto than behind the story of the young man with the cream tarts, or the *Adventure of the Hansom Cab* in the *New Arabian Nights*. It is a playing at make-believe. When the book came out in November, things looked as if Stevenson were somewhat precariously maintaining a reputation for possessing a talent of which much might be expected.

Yet already by that time he had completed another piece of imaginative fiction which was to be recognised as a work of genius. He had written *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Here we come on a very odd passage in literary history, perhaps the most clearly recorded instance of unconscious cerebration. Probably everyone who has written much has found that a piece of work which overnight seemed all of a tangle unravels itself easily

with the morning. But that is only an almost mechanical process of sifting and selection which has gone forward ; things have got into their proper order and places ; they are seen in the right relations. With some men, however, night brings more than the result of cool patience ; Scott, we are told, used to lie down with his story come to a sticking point, and say to himself, " Never mind, we'll get it when we are dressing " ; and while he was bestirring himself with buttons and braces in the morning, the appropriate invention would present itself. This, however, implies only that, while Scott slept, some part of his mind continued a train of thought on which his waking faculties had already laboured ; and this unconscious activity would have access, one must presume, to the store-house of his memory. Sleeping or waking, Scott's mind could only get at what was in Scott already.

Stevenson's case is more remarkable. He had been for some time much occupied with thoughts (as Graham Balfour puts it) about " the duality of man's nature and the alternation of good and evil ". Musset, one of his favourite authors, had more than once used the device of a dialogue, between, as it were, the twin halves of one person—the shadow side and the sunlit : "*Sombre enfant, vêtu de noir, qui me ressemble comme un frère*". Stevenson gave the notion a grimmer turn when in 1884 he wrote *Markheim*, the story of a thief who on Christmas day, when shops are closed, gets admission to a receiver of stolen goods, murders him, and alone in the house sets about the search for hidden money. But the murderer's secret movements in his agony of apprehension are soon interrupted by the



arrival of another person, who, after presenting himself at first as the devil, is slowly transformed into Markheim's better self; and under his prompting, the murderer decides for a surrender to justice rather than a plunge deeper into crime. In short, the better self determines to be done once and for all with the worse. Yet this treatment of the theme did not satisfy its inventor; Stevenson's mind continued to be haunted by it; and there is a significant passage in the chapter of *Kidnapped* which introduces Captain Hoseason, the shipmaster who carried out David's kidnapping. "I wondered if it was possible that Ransome's stories could be true, and half disbelieved them; they fitted so ill with the man's looks. But indeed he was neither so good as I supposed him, nor quite so bad as Ransome did; for, in fact, he was two men and left the better one behind as soon as he set foot on board his vessel."

A few weeks after this was written, Mrs. Stevenson was awakened in the small hours "by cries of horror", and she wakened the sleeper. "Why did you wake me?" he protested, "I was dreaming a fine bogey tale." He had dreamed the scene of the powders, by which a student of transcendental medicine transforms himself into another bodily shape; and the impression was so strong that, throwing aside all else, he wrote the story off as it had come to him.

Mr. Osbourne has recorded: "I remember the first reading as if it were yesterday. Louis came downstairs in a fever; read nearly half the book aloud; and then while we were still gasping, he was away again and busy writing. I doubt if the first draft took so long as three days." I must quote here from the biography:

He had lately had a hæmorrhage, and was strictly forbidden all discussion or excitement. No doubt the reading aloud was contrary to the doctor's orders; at any rate Mrs. Stevenson, according to the custom then in force, wrote her detailed criticism of the story as it then stood, pointing out her chief objection—that it was really an allegory, whereas he had treated it purely as if it were a story. In the first draft Jekyll's nature was bad all through, and the Hyde change was worked only for the sake of a disguise. She gave the paper to her husband and left the room. After a while his bell rang; on her return she found him sitting up in bed (the clinical thermometer in his mouth) pointing with a long denunciatory finger to a pile of ashes. He had burned the entire draft. Having realised that he had taken the wrong point of view, that the tale was an allegory and not another *Markheim*, he at once destroyed his manuscript, acting not out of pique, but from a fear that he might be tempted to make too much use of it, and not rewrite the whole from a new standpoint.

It was written again in three days.

That act of destruction should be always remembered for an example of an artist's heroism. There was, of course, revision; but in essence Stevenson accepted what his "brownies" (as he called them) had brought, even to the machinery of the powders which critics condemned as "too material an agency". Yet how skilfully he turned this machinery to account will be seen by whoever re-reads the terrifying chapter that tells of the lost creature yammering inside the closed door, and crying out for a fresh supply of drugs when the mixture will no longer act.

Stevenson's "brownies", as he himself recognised, were highly educated ministers; they had lived so long with their master that they presented to him scenes arranged in artistic gradation of intensity. But their master also knew his business, and all the subsidiary

invention which provides a framework for the dream fantasy is admirably devised. It was good to make so fantastic a drama pass in the presence of plain sensible men of the world. What they can accept as real, we are constrained unconsciously to accept also ; and the first thing necessary is that they should live before our eyes, that we should see and touch the world they live in. From the outset Stevenson secures this hold on us ; Mr. Utterson, his lawyer, decent and reticent, is felt as a likeable trustworthy presence. The streets of London where the story passes are brought vividly before us in hours of haunting silence, or under the blinding veil of fog ; yet again and again, to mark how near the savage and uncanny can live to ordered comfort, he sketches with a few sure strokes a fireside, a well-set table, and warmth and wine. (Oddly enough, there is no other of all his books where his kindly feeling for vintages makes itself so often felt.)

But there is a characteristic avoidance. The tale, as it develops, might almost be one of a community of monks. Mr. Utterson is a bachelor, so is Jekyll himself ; so by all indications is Enfield, the younger man who first brings to Utterson a tale of Hyde's brutalities. So, for that matter, is Jekyll's butler, whose part in the story is important and who is not only perfectly a butler but also a man of flesh and blood, loyal and courageous in his attachments. Women scarcely have any part in the action. Yet it is clearly indicated that Henry Jekyll, the rich, respected and beneficent physician, indulged from the first in secret pleasures not easily reconciled with his desire for a grave and becoming reputation ; it is made plain that this discrepancy within him fixed his attention on a belief

"that man is not truly one, but truly two"—and perhaps even, in the last analysis, "a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens". Here then was the temptation to which researches in the laboratory opened a way; the temptation to disengage and liberate those elements which in the dual existence were either restrained or indulged with shamefacedness. But of all the excesses which Hyde committed when he was separately embodied, and of all that Jekyll gloated over the thought of doing when he should again become Hyde, there is no picture. We are shown only, by the narrative of eyewitnesses, two instances of hideous and unreasoning cruelty.

Nowadays, when in psychological studies so much attention is given to repressed sexual impulses, it may be doubted whether any author handling such a theme would have been so reticent. It may even be doubted whether Balzac would have been. Yet Stevenson would never paint anything which he could not paint outright. He was remarkable, as Henry James notes, for his power of "imagining physical states"; and, working as he worked under Victorian restrictions, he avoided as far as possible all scenes of love-making, except the most virginal. But in this instance I think a sure instinct guided him. Insistence on the sexual would have brought colours into the story alien to its pattern; what he desired was to convey the presence of evil wholly divorced from good. Now, of all wrongs in the world Stevenson most hated cruelty; and the inhuman brute whom he conceives is shown to us not in his beastly lusts but, first, in his savage indifference to the infliction of pain, and, later, in a murderous frenzy of slaughter. The creature from whose very

presence all human beings recoil, in whose atmosphere their blood chills and their flesh creeps, is the creature divested of all human kindness.

No doubt some of those who drew the moral from this tale in pulpits pointed out that at the end of criminal self-indulgence cruelty is always found ; and no doubt Stevenson would have wished them to draw that moral. His allegory had made plain his belief that though Jekyll and Hyde may for a long time alternate, there comes a day when Jekyll is no longer master, and the lower nature dominates till the higher is submerged, it may be, past recovery. But the important thing to note here is that Stevenson had now fulfilled his purpose as a preacher. Once the little book became known, it was recognised for a monitory discourse that had the singular quality of exciting its readers. The publishers, Longmans, had evidently been impressed by this quality, for they adopted the unusual method of issuing it at a shilling, so that it was within the reach of all who ever bought a book ; and the sale was by the standards of that day enormous. In America pirated editions were even more widespread.

Quite probably to-day not one person in ten who knows the name of the book has read it ; but the same is certainly true of *Gulliver's Travels*. Stevenson, like Swift, made an ineffaceable mark on the public mind by a piece of invention powerfully conceived and superbly written ; Jekyll and Hyde have become symbols like Lilliput and Brobdingnag. To-day, while these lines are being written, *Treasure Island* is exhibited on many cinema screens, a play is running based on it ; very few books show so much vitality

and even generative power after more than half a century. Yet but for the celebrity earned for the author of *Treasure Island* by this other and wholly different achievement, it is odds but that *Treasure Island* might by this time be forgotten. It is certain that Stevenson's way to prosperous fame was made smooth by this very singular allegory in narrative, which, though entirely characteristic of his mind and of his style, is entirely unlike and apart from anything else in his work—or in that of any other modern author. Perhaps the nearest analogy to it is Balzac's *Peau de Chagrin*. I should not hesitate to say that *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is no less superior to the *Peau de Chagrin* than Balzac as a novelist is superior to Robert Louis Stevenson. But both these fables lie nearer to poetry than to ordinary prose fiction ; and of the two men Stevenson was the more a poet—and never so completely a poet as in this prose tale.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE TECHNIQUE OF WRITING

STEVENSON'S habit of discontinuous working makes it difficult to set out the story of his activities in a straightforward discussion ; and I must turn back now to consider other productions of that vivid and versatile intelligence during the period which saw the finishing of *Prince Otto* and the rapid completion of *Jekyll and Hyde*. This may be taken as dating from his dangerous illness at Nice in the winter of 1883-84, and covers the earlier half of the three years which he spent at Bourne-mouth. Throughout it, he was an invalid with no freedom of movement, and so was constrained to find recreation in a change of work.

It includes three short stories, *The Body Snatcher*, *Markheim* and *Olalla* ; a play, *Robert Macaire*, written again in collaboration with Henley ; half a dozen essays on various subjects ; two papers on the art of literature ; and in verse, several of the numbers which completed the *Child's Garden*, and four of the poems which appeared in *Underwoods*. The play has no importance, nor has *The Body Snatcher*, originally written in 1881 when he and his wife were busy with what he called "crawlers"—tales of horror—before he launched out on *Treasure Island*. *Markheim* and

*Olalla* have affinities with *Jekyll and Hyde*—*Markheim* by its subject, *Olalla* because, like *Jekyll and Hyde*, it was the result of a dream ; but unlike it, to Stevenson's chagrin, a dream which he failed to convert into reality. Yet the allegory postulated physical happenings which we know to be impossible, while in the story nothing runs counter to general human experience. None the less, after reading *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* we might incline to say, as the bishop said about *Gulliver's Travels*, that there were some things in it that we could not quite believe ; while if we compare *Olalla* with *The Pavilion on the Links*, which it resembles in being (unlike most of Stevenson's work) a love story, one appears solid and substantial, the other a dissolving vapour. It is true that the earlier scene is laid in a familiar landscape, whereas the action of *Olalla* passes in Spain, where Stevenson never set foot ; yet the last objection likely to be raised is that we are not made to feel the surroundings. He had seen enough in the Cevennes and in the foothills along the Mediterranean seaboard to make it easy for him to sketch a suggestion of wild tracks through mountains with the characteristic vegetation of Southern Europe ; and when he had brought his Englishman, a volunteer wounded in the Carlist wars, to the great half-deserted house away in its remote fastnesses, memory of his dream gave him not only the courts and the columned galleries and the pigeons that peopled them, but the very flicker of sunlight and shadow over all. He conveys with more than usual felicity of evocation the uncanny sense of a place haunted in its dilapidation by spirits of its prime ; and the device of confronting the visitor with ancestral



family portraits is skilfully used. All holds together, the spell still works, when, after seeing first the son of the house lapsed into a half-witted peasant, we begin to make acquaintance with his mother, dozing in the sunlight like some graceful animal—lacking the flash of human intelligence. It is only when we meet Olalla herself that the story loses its hold ; for Stevenson then begins to impose upon his dream-world an arbitrary moral idea. The stranger, after days of moving about in the vast house, suddenly comes face to face with this daughter of the ancient stock in whom not only the race's beauty has survived but their dominating intelligence. Once again, it is like Orlando's meeting with Rosalind or Romeo's with Juliet ; at first exchange of glances, the two are ready to fall into each other's arms. So far all is as Stevenson must have dreamed it ; there is no mistaking the description of a thing seen—even by the inner eye. But then, presumably, in the dream Olalla mysteriously evaded her lover ; invention had to tell how and why. As I see it, the romancer with all the urgency of his nature conceived the scarcely checked leap of each to the other ; and then the moralist contrived a theory of a girl who would not consent to perpetuate the degenerate corruption of blood whose horrors had been given by one other vision in the dream. For certainly Stevenson dreamed how the lethargic mother woke suddenly out of her doze at the sight of a cut finger, and fell to with her teeth like a ravening leopard. So the story has to be one of frustration : if it does not become real, I think it is because Stevenson actually felt the surge of passion which drew Olalla and her lover to each other, and then was obliged to make

himself believe in the woman's resistance to it from a moral motive, and the man's submission to her decree.

The essays of this period vary in quality—as he was aware; *Fontainebleau*, *The Ideal House* and *The Great North Road* were not included by him in any volume of reprints. For *Memories and Portrait* (published in 1887) he selected *The Character of Dogs*; *A Penny Plain*, *Twopence Coloured*; *Old Mortality* and *A Humble Remonstrance*. These were works on which he chose to be judged; and the first was in the main a tribute to the charms of a Skye terrier presented to him after his marriage by Sir Walter Simpson, and called originally "Walter". The name by various vicissitudes came down to "Bogue", and Bogue was an adored companion; his end came before the Stevensons left Bournemouth and they never permitted themselves to have another dog. But the essay was written while Bogue flourished, "black as a hat, with a wet bramble for a nose and two cairngorms for eyes"; so that no touch of melancholy infects its very delightful humour and observation.

*A Penny Plain*, *Twopence Coloured* is Stevenson's tribute to the joys of "Skelt's Juvenile Drama",—"pages of gesticulating villains, epileptic combats, bosky forests, palaces and warships, frowning fortresses and prison vaults"—on which his early imagination was nourished. To appreciate this one must have been a "Skeltite", and except from Stevenson I never heard of these delights. But no one who values *distinguished writing and original thought* can be indifferent to the essay called *Old Mortality*, which for an inner circle of readers had a commemorative purpose. Indeed, whoever reads it must see that these

reflections on a graveyard in the heart of old Edinburgh are designed to lead, by an approach of humorous yet melancholy moralising, to the presentment of an epitaph. At the end of 1883, death for the first time struck close to Stevenson. One in his group of friends and fellow-students had stood out to their imagination as Steerforth did to David Copperfield's; admired and courted, courteous and good company, yet with a Byronic cynicism—"incredulous of good". Then "somewhere on the high seas of life, with his health, his hopes, his patrimony and his self-respect went miserably down". From disaster he crept back defeated and admitting defeat, but without bitterness or whimpering, a better and kindlier companion than in his prosperity, and, till the disease that he had earned finally destroyed him, "to his last step, gentle, urbane, and with the will to smile".

Chief among the qualities which endear Stevenson to us as a writer is a special gift for depicting friendship between men. Friendships were the adornment and the delight of his early life; and now, faced with the first gap in the circle of such intimacies, he felt the need to defend a memory which life had tarnished. For that defence he drew on his own philosophy and his own experience; the praise which he gave was praise which he had a right to give, as the proved soldier may speak of courage. He was, as all his work shows, a great lover of valiancy, but his own valiancy lay often bedridden; it was the cheerful endurance of frustration. While every new exertion of his powers added proof of their value, exertion was, time and again, followed by a thwarting weakness. When, after the appearance of *Treasure Island*, success was knocking

at his door, a fierce attack of his old enemy left him powerless; and then came this news of his friend's death. Here was the case of a man who also had known failure of the body, but had no achievement to look back on, nor any to hope for; a proud man, who in the pride of youth had been disgraced by his own faults, and yet in that defeat had preserved and even strengthened those qualities for which he had been loved. Stevenson, lying there bedridden, compared his own troubles with his friend's, and found the defence he wanted; he spoke his praise of the man who, after supreme experience of frustration, with no hope of recovery, kept a natural kindness and "the will to smile".

Yet the essays by which Stevenson at this period specially interested readers, who either were or wanted to be writers, were discussions of his own craft. He had begun on this earlier, and characteristically with a moral issue. *The Morality of the Profession of Letters*, published in *The Fortnightly* of April 1881, was written during his first winter at Davos as a reply to an article by James Payn which gave "a very encouraging view of the profession" in its financial aspect. Stevenson protests against having "this question, so important to the public and ourselves, debated solely on the ground of money".

"Literature, like any other art, is singularly interesting to the artist; and in a degree peculiar to itself among the arts, it is useful to mankind. . . . A lad with some liking to the jingle of words betakes himself to letters for his life; by and by, he learns more gravity, he finds that he chose better than he knew; that if he receives a small wage, he is in a position to

do considerable services ; and that it is in his power in some small measure, to protect the oppressed and to defend the truth."

This, he says, is " to speak of literature at its highest ", mindful of great living names—Carlyle, Ruskin, Browning and Tennyson. Yet " even the humblest sort of literary work " has power " either to do great harm or great good ". Journalism provides the bulk of a nation's reading ; " the sneering, the selfish and the cowardly are scattered in broad-sheets on every table while the antidote in small volumes lies unread upon the shelf ". French and American newspapers he counted more effective for evil than the English, " not because they are so much baser, but because they are so much more readable ". But in the English as in the others there was, he held, deliberate garbling of news for party purposes. " There are two duties incumbent upon every man who enters on the business of writing ; truth to the fact, and a good spirit in the treatment." This is not to say that a man is expected to be impartial ; on the contrary it is his duty to express his view of the facts, once the facts are honestly set out. But since, " designedly or not he has set himself up for a leader of the minds of men, he must see that his own mind is kept supple, charitable and bright. . . ."

As to the moral value of fiction, his attitude was clear. " To please is to serve ; and so far from its being difficult to instruct while you amuse, it is difficult to do the one thoroughly without the other." That perhaps is a truism, but mighty well put.

Next in this string of disquisitions comes *A Note on Realism*, written in 1883, which, like all other essays

on the same subject, suffers from the fact that no one agrees as to what "realism" may mean. But what Stevenson wanted to say is clear. The great change in literature during the nineteenth century consisted, he held, in the admission of detail; Scott brought it into prose fiction, which in the hands of Voltaire had been "as abstract as a parable"; Balzac and his followers "bound it like a duty on the novelist". Yet insistence on detail is not the only way to truth. "Molière, wielding his artificial medium, has told us to all time" the truth about his characters and the human types they represent.

Then follow remarks on style, or, as I should prefer to put it, manner; to which, as is usual in Stevenson's dissertations, an illustration gives value:

It was easier to begin to write *Esmond* than *Vanity Fair*, since in the first, the style was dictated by the nature of the plan. . . . But the case is exceptional. Usually, in all works that have been conceived from within outwards, and generously nourished from the author's mind, the moment in which he begins to execute is one of extreme perplexity and strain. Artists of indifferent energy and an imperfect devotion to their own ideal make this ungrateful effort once for all; and, having formed a style, adhere to it through life. But those of a higher order cannot rest content with a process which, as they continue to employ it, must infallibly degenerate towards the academic and the cut-and-dried. Every fresh work in which they embark is the signal for a fresh engagement of the whole forces of their mind; and the changing views which occupy this growth of their experience are marked by still more sweeping alterations in the manner of their art.

I do not myself think that Stevenson can properly be said to have altered his style at any moment, though its distinctive character developed. A bowler alters

his method of attack according to conditions ; a batsman going in at the beginning of a test match does not play as if he had runs to knock off against time ; but in every case the style, the personal gesture, remains unmistakeable. Stevenson appears more varied than most writers, because he chose by preference the way of narrative in the first person, as Thackeray did in *Esmond* ; and whether in *Treasure Island*, or *Kidnapped*, or *The Master of Ballantrae*, or the very different *Beach of Falesá* or *The Wrecker*, he must speak in the manner suited to an imagined person. Nevertheless the style was Stevenson's : just as whether Irving played Hamlet or Shylock or Benedict or Mathias in *The Bells* there was something common to all these impersonations, and that was the personal gesture of Irving. In that common element, the excellence resided.

At times when Stevenson used the first person, as in *The Merry Men* or *Olalla*, he invested the imaginary narrator with his own range of descriptive power ; that is to say, he did not really dramatise him, but concentrated on obtaining descriptive effect through the full use of his own most characteristic faculty. Perhaps by this choice of a manner of attack he sacrificed verisimilitude, and that may be why neither story has been completely acceptable. In *Catriona*, written late in his career, he imposed simplicity on himself by making David Balfour the narrator of these loves of boy and girl. But in his last two works of fiction, *The Ebb Tide* and *Weir of Hermiston*, he chose a method that could use in its full development his own matured and accomplished style. These two books, dealing with sombre themes of dark passion, needed a complex instrument.

Two others of these literary discussions will be delightful at least to all who shared Stevenson's taste in books. *A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas's* does not appear to have been published till it appeared in *Memories and Portraits*; possibly he could find no editor who shared his enthusiasm for the six well-filled volumes of the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*. It was perhaps too frankly autobiographical for public taste, and at this date—say 1886—magazines were not yet eagerly grasping at anything about Stevenson; but for us to-day it has the great merit of saying what books he “re-read the oftenest”:

One or two of Scott's novels, Shakespeare, Montaigne, *The Egoist*, and the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*, form the inner circle of my intimates. Behind these comes a good troop of dear acquaintances; *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the front rank, *The Bible in Spain* not far behind. There are besides a certain number that look at me with reproach as I pass them by on my shelves; books that I once thumbed and studied; houses which were once like home to me, but where I now rarely visit. I am on these sad terms (and blush to confess it) with Wordsworth, Horace, Burns and Hazlitt. Last of all, there is the class of book that has its hour of brilliancy—glows, sings, charms, and then fades again into insignificance until the fit return. Chief of those who thus smile and frown on me by turns, I must name Virgil and Herrick, who, were they but

Their sometime selves the same throughout the year, must have stood in the first company with the six names of my continual literary intimates. . . .

How often I have read *Guy Mannering*, *Rob Roy*, or *Redgauntlet*, I have no means of guessing, having begun young. But it is either four or five times that I have read *The Egoist*, and either five or six that I have read the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*.

And so we come to a charming discourse on his affection



for that wide pasture—though he sets aside large tracts of it as innutritious, especially such as are occupied by doings of the titular hero and even of his fair lady. La Vallière is set down among the heroines who “start the trick of ‘getting ugly’; authors know it well; one author in particular with whose works I am very well acquainted, though I cannot read them”. Then, swiftly he passes in review “the creators of desirable women and their creations”: Shakespeare’s Rosalind, Elizabeth Bennett—Rose Jocelyn, Lucy Desborough and Clara Middleton, “fair women, with fair names, the daughters of George Meredith”. One can feel the pleasure in the pen that set down that ringing tribute. Yet, Stevenson goes on, none of these writers, except Shakespeare, “could have plucked at the moustache of d’Artagnan”. All the rest of the essay is mingled eulogy of d’Artagnan and of his creator—“the ventripotent mulatto, the great eater, worker, earner and waster, the man of much and witty laughter, the man of the great heart, and, alas, of the doubtful honesty”. He has praise even for Dumas’ writing—“with every fault, yet never tedious; with no merit, yet inevitably right”. But the pith of the discourse concerns not Dumas but d’Artagnan. “I do not say there is no character as well drawn in Shakespeare; I do say there is none that I love so wholly”. If he sets the *Vicomte de Bragelonne* above its predecessors, it is because d’Artagnan pleases him best in old age when he “has mellowed into a man so witty, rough, kind and upright, that he takes the heart by storm”. Admitting that the book has many passages “within a measurable distance of unreality”, yet, he says:

I cannot count that a poor dinner, or a poor book, where I meet with those I love ; and, above all, in this last volume, I find a singular charm of spirit. It breathes a pleasant and a tonic sadness, always brave, never hysterical. Upon the crowded, noisy life of this long tale, evening gradually falls ; and the lights are extinguished, and the heroes pass away one by one. One by one they go, and not a regret embitters their departure ; the young succeed them in their places, Louis Quatorze is swelling larger and shining broader, another generation and another France dawn on the horizon ; but for us and these old men whom we have loved so long, the inevitable end draws near and is welcome.

Not all will agree with the appreciations in this essay—especially not all Frenchmen ; but no judge of writing will dispute the charm of what has just been quoted. And when a man who can write such a passage sees in a book what we do not see, it is well to remember that he has brought to the reading of it what others had not got to bring.

Next, as Stevenson placed it in the volume (but written at Davos in 1882), is *A Gossip on Romance* which again has an autobiographic interest by its insistence on the power of places to suggest romantic happenings. But here it is more important to note the admirably detailed criticism of other romantics, especially of Sir Walter. Stevenson, after pointing out the perfect felicity of one piece of narrative in *Guy Mannering*, condemns roundly the carelessness of the manner in which it is introduced, and then passes to a general judgment :

Here we have a man of the finest creative instinct touching with perfect certainty and charm the romantic junctures of his story ; and we find him utterly careless, almost, it would seem, incapable, in the technical matter of style, and

not only frequently weak, but frequently wrong in points of drama. In character parts, indeed, and particularly in the Scotch, he was delicate, strong and truthful ; but the trite, obliterated features of too many of his heroes have already wearied two generations of readers. At times his characters will speak with something far beyond propriety with a true heroic note ; but on the next page they will be wading wearily forward with an ungrammatical and undramatic rigmarole of words. The man who could conceive and write the character of Elspeth of the Craighburnfoot, as Scott has conceived and written it, had not only splendid romantic, but splendid tragic gifts. How comes it, then, that he could so often fob us off with languid, inarticulate twaddle ?

It seems to me that the explanation is to be found in the very quality of his surprising merits. As his books are play to the reader, so were they play to him. He conjured up the romantic with delight, but he had hardly patience to describe it. He was a great day-dreamer, a seer of fit and beautiful and humorous visions, but hardly a great artist ; hardly, in the manful sense, an artist at all. He pleased himself, and so he pleases us. Of the pleasures of his art he tasted fully ; but of its toils and vigils and distresses never man knew less. A great romantic—an idle child.

Except the first, these essays were not, so to say, provoked by anything which Stevenson chose to regard as a challenge to his theories. But in the close of 1884, when he was settled down at Bournemouth, two established novelists delivered themselves in public on the interests of their art. Walter Besant began it with a lecture in which he discoursed upon " the modern English novel " ; Henry James replied with an essay on *The Art of Fiction*, which can be read in his volume *Pastel Portraits*. James refused to admit a difference between the novel of character and one of incident ; for, in a story " what is character but the determination of incident ? what is incident but the illustration of

character ? ” To make his first point clear, he cited two instances :

I have just been reading at the same time the delightful story of *Treasure Island* and (in a manner less consecutive) Goncourt's *Chérie*. One of these works treats of murders, mysteries, islands of dreadful renown, hairbreadth escapes, miraculous coincidences, and buried doubloons. The other treats of a little French girl who lived in a fine house in Paris and died of wounded sensibility because no one would marry her. I call *Treasure Island* delightful because it appears to me to have succeeded wonderfully in what it attempts, but *Chérie* strikes me as having failed deplorably in what it attempts, that is in tracing the development of the moral consciousness of a child. But one is as much a novel as the other and has a story quite as much.

“*A priori*”, he added, “I should have been more likely to appreciate the French book, because I have been a child, but have been on a quest for buried treasure only in supposition”. This drew from Stevenson *A Humble Remonstrance* in *Longman's Magazine*—perhaps the most charming of all his critical essays. He begins with Besant, who had set up an opposition between the “art of fiction” and the “art of poetry”. When Stevenson is arguing that poetry enters into all the arts, and fiction into all of them but architecture, one feels in every sentence the enjoyment of a born dialectician, but at the same time one notes his engaging courtesy. He goes on then to suggest that the subject really under discussion is not the art of fiction but the art of narrative, which “in fact is the same whether it is applied to the selection and illustration of a real series of events or of an imaginary series. It is in every history where events and men, rather than ideas, are presented—in Tacitus, in Carlyle, in Michelet, in Macaulay—that the

novelist will find many of his own methods most conspicuously and adroitly handled." But then he limits his definition "to the art of fictitious narrative in prose" and proceeds to cope with Henry James, a much more cunning fencer. James had insisted on "the sanctity of truth to the novelist". But what does truth mean here? Can art "compete with life"? And he describes the artist: "Armed with a pen and a dictionary to depict the passions, armed with a tube of superior flake-white to paint the portrait of the insufferable sun. . . . Man's one method, whether he reasons or creates, is to half-shut his eyes against the dazzle and confusion of reality. . . . Literature, above all in the mood of narrative, imitates not life but speech. The real art that dealt with life directly was that of the first men who told their stories round the savage camp fire."

Many will remember one passage in which Stevenson, after grateful response to James's compliments, mocks at the observation that he "had never hunted buried treasure".—"There never was a child (unless Master James) but has hunted gold and been a pirate". Stevenson exaggerates; Tom Sawyer is the eternal boy, no doubt; but he is not every boy, and probably a large proportion of estimable human boys, with Henry James among them, never wanted to be Tom Sawyer. Still, he is perfectly right to emphasise what Henry James omitted—the appeal made to "certain almost sensual and quite illogical tendencies in man" by incidents of violence.

In the novel of adventure, he holds, character may be admitted within certain limits (as indeed it is admitted in *Treasure Island*). "But to add more

traits, to start the hare of moral or intellectual interest ", while your reader wants chiefly to know what happened next, " is not to enrich but to stultify your tale ".

For the novel of character, Stevenson holds that no coherency of plot is required—as " it turns on the humours of the persons represented ; these are, to be sure, embodied in incidents, but the incidents need not march in a progression ". Here passion is out of place. But in the dramatic novel, as in a play, passion, not incident, is everything and passion must be progressive.

These observations, he adds, are not so much intended to amuse the public as " to offer helpful advice to a young writer ".

There we have the reason why he got so strong a hold on the affection of his own craft, and especially on those who were younger than he. It is true that no man liked him better than did Henry James, and no one else has written so well about him, though James owed him no more than the pleasure and stimulus of his company. But those who were entering on the business of writing had their own special gratitude to this admired craftsman, so ready to come forward and speak, " not of the finished picture and its worth when done, but of the brushes, the palette, and the north light ".

I can testify to the eagerness with which students plunged into a paper, *On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature*, that he published a few months later (April 1885) in the *Contemporary Review*—and to the confused dismay which a reading of it produced. A beginner who should attempt to make it his guide in the art, would, I think, never write at all. If a

skilled teacher of skating were to begin by describing to his class in detail the various muscular adjustments which they must make, and then cry "Skate", the result would be paralysis. But he knows of course that each of them possesses that sense of balance which a baby must develop before it can accomplish straightforward locomotion, to say nothing of fancy walking that can avoid a chair; his business is to assist and direct new applications of this gift—as well as to show what can be done. Now Stevenson was in the first place a performer, who had shown mastery in many styles; he could cover a distance like a fenman with swinging strides, keeping a smooth rhythm even in their rough energy, or he could describe gracefully the most elaborate arabesques. My criticism of him as a teacher is that, in analysing the performance of other practitioners, he attributed to deliberate choice combinations which were and could only be the result of instinct. It is true, as he says, that the business of any art is "to make a pattern; a pattern it may be, of colours, of sounds, of changing attitudes, geometrical figures, or imitative lines, but still a pattern"; true, that in literature the pattern must be made with words. It is not true, however, that these are "finite and quite rigid", like blocks in a child's box of toy bricks. "Good" is neither finite nor rigid in the associations which it conveys, nor is "a star"; the artist can alter the colours which they give out by the setting in which he places them; with the word "star" you can call up the sublime or the ridiculous. Yet for one purpose in the pattern, they are finite; they have a fixed sound. It is true again—not the less true because a counsel of perfection—that in writing "each phrase of each

sentence, like an air or a recitative in music, should be so artfully compounded out of long and short, out of accented and unaccented, as to gratify the sensual ear". "And of these," he adds, "the ear is the sole judge." Yes, but the ear acts unconsciously, like the sense of balance; it knows if it is pleased, it does not analyse exactly how it has been pleased any more than the skater realises what muscles have been called into play.

Still, among what seemed confusing, excellent observations were found: "Each phrase in literature is built of sounds, as each phrase in music consists of notes; one sound suggests, echoes, demands and harmonises another; and the art of rightly using these concordances is the first art in literature. It used to be a piece of good advice to all young readers to avoid alliteration; and the advice was sound, in so far as it prevented daubing. None the less for that, it was abominable nonsense, and the mere raving of the blindest of the blind who will not see. The beauty of the contents of a phrase, or of a sentence, depends implicitly upon alliteration and upon assonance. The vowel demands to be repeated; the consonant demands to be repeated; and both cry aloud to be perpetually varied."

Whether we agree or not that this is the "final art in literature", these observations are true; but when he goes on to illustrate, truth is distorted. He quotes Milton's famous passage: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat". Now I



flatly refuse to believe that when Milton wrote this he said to himself, "Let us make dexterous play with the letters *s* and *r*, setting in among them the almost inseparable group *p*, *v*, *f* and then, for a concluding hammerstroke, wind up with a group of dental *t*'s". Nor, I am sure, did Stevenson want us to believe it. The truth is that Milton, gifted with the finest ear that any writer in English has possessed whether in prose or verse, used all the resources of the language both in sound and sense; and that Stevenson, a passionate and most painstaking learner, applied himself to analyse most anxiously the combinations of sound from which the effects came together in an harmonious pattern.

That line of investigation was of course not altogether new. Frenchmen had attempted to attach various attributes to the different vowel sounds—" *L'a est large et sonore* ", and so on. Tennyson, an artist no less meticulous and self-conscious than Stevenson, but infinitely less communicative, had been asked about his technical methods, and had growled out something as to "putting the geese out of the boat". But nobody writing in English required to be told that the hissing letter *s* was deplorably frequent in the language, and had to be kept in check. Stevenson, however, went much further in his recommendations. How far the conclusions that he arrived at were present to his mind when he was writing still as a learner, how far they governed his pen when he wrote with long-practised mastery, I cannot pretend to affirm. For himself, that intensive study was fully justified in its results; whatever conditions he imposed on his art never cramped his freedom of expression; he moved always with an energy that lost nothing by its grace. And for those

of us who attended to his teaching, however we might be puzzled or disconcerted by a display of the intricacies which he urged us to bear in mind, the lesson was not wasted. Everybody knew that in writing, words should be put together so as to sound well, but not everybody had realised that we were working in alliterations and assonances ; not everybody had realised that alliteration meant more than a repetition of initial letters, nor that in a word like "*impecunious*", the *p* is of more alliterative value than the *i*. Whether we knew it or not, we were forced to attend more intelligently to sounds in our composition ; he taught us to educate the ear.

Other points in this didactic essay were less novel and surprising. Everybody knew the importance of the choice of words, which he puts first in his division of the subject, and on this, realising that insistence was less necessary, he said least, though that little is illuminating ; I quote a sentence : " The words in Carlyle seem electrified into an energy of lineament like the faces of men furiously moved ; whilst the words in Macaulay, apt enough to convey his meaning, harmonious enough to sound, yet glide from the memory like undistinguished elements in a general effect ". But in the second division he extends himself fully, emphasising the importance of what he calls " The Web ".

" The true business of the literary artist is to plait or weave his meaning, involving it around itself ; so that each sentence, by successive phrases, shall first come into a kind of knot, and then after a moment of suspended meaning, solve and clear itself. In every properly constructed sentence there should be observed

this knot or hitch ; so that (however delicately) we are led to foresee, to expect and then to welcome the successive phrases. . . . Each phrase, besides, is to be comely in itself ; and between the implication and the evolution of the sentence there should be a satisfying equipoise of sound."

For, as he says, the writer is like a conjuror juggling with two oranges. " His pattern which is to please the supersensual ear is yet addressed, throughout and first of all, to the demands of logic. Whatever be the obscurities, whatever the intricacies of the argument, the neatness of the fabric must not suffer ; or the artist is proved unequal to the design."

One need not suppose that Stevenson ignored the uses of the curt abrupt sentence of a single phrase ; but his whole training, begun in Scotland where affections, interests and pieties drew him to the grave cadences of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writing, was completed in France ; and the French, through all the arts from literature to cookery, have been studious of texture, lovers of a fine-wrought complicated finish.

It is difficult in such a welter as the world of writers has become, to track out any particular influence ; but one thing at least may be credited to Stevenson, for it is less obscure and impalpable than matters purely of style. In his *Humble Remonstrance*, addressed to Henry James, but designed explicitly to offer helpful advice to the young, he laid it down as a maxim that the novelist must " allow neither himself in the narration, nor any character in the course of the dialogue, to utter one sentence that is not part and parcel of the business of the story or the discussion of the problem involved ".

When he said that, he carried the assent of his craft with him ; and yet it condemned what had been the practice of the most admired English novelists, with Thackeray at their head as a chief offender. The digressive habit by which the author deliberately broke the spell of narrative, and even permitted himself to come forward as the showman manipulating puppets, was peculiarly characteristic of the English novel, and was at its worst in the generation before Stevenson. I think it may fairly be affirmed that Stevenson killed it dead. Novelists since his day have stuck closer to their proper business, which is to tell a story.

But what impressed itself at the time on those who studied the art of writing was his insistence on technicalities. In 1887, when *Memories and Portraits*, his second volume of collected essays, was published, it ended with the *Gossip on Romance* and the *Humble Remonstrance* ; but early in it was placed a paper not previously accessible. In this, under the title *A College Magazine*, he described minutely his own preparation for literature. Having recounted (in a passage already quoted) his outdoor sketchings in the penny note-books, and his indoor efforts to reproduce effects that had pleased him in his favourite authors, he lays down the law : " That, like it or not, is the way to learn to write ; whether I have profited or not, that is the way. Before he can tell what cadences he truly prefers, the student should have tried all that are possible ; before he can choose and preserve a fitting key of words, he should long have practised the literary scales ; and it is only after years of such gymnastic that he can sit down at last, legions of words swarming to his call, dozens of turns of phrase simultaneously

bidding for his choice, and he himself knowing what to do, and (within the narrow limit of a man's ability) able to do it."

There was some inclination to regard these dissertations as a form of self-advertisement. I have no doubt that Stevenson was influenced by the example of French painters, among whom many of the most distinguished have always frankly been teachers. Any pulpit was a temptation to him, but this was the pulpit of his choice ; and Graham Balfour says that he thought seriously at this time of setting up a class for the technical study of writing. That came to nothing : all of his practical exposition had to be done through print ; and attention to his teaching had been ensured by another remarkable success.

## CHAPTER IX

### KIDNAPPED

EARLY in 1886, after *Jekyll and Hyde* had appeared, Stevenson turned back to the very different tale which he had begun to write twelve months before. But the idea from which it germinated had lain much longer in his mind. He had planned, in 1881, to write a general History of Scotland during the century of Jacobite troubles; this soon came down to projects of more detailed studies, especially of Highland affairs, and from Davos, in his second winter there, he wrote to his father: "It occurred to me last night in bed that I could write 'The Murder of Red Colin: A Story of the Forfeited Estates'." This letter, which went on to ask for certain books, chiefly records of State Trials, shows how widely his reading had extended; but it does not seem that he even began to draft notes concerning this famous killing. Yet there the seed lay; and now, after four years, it sprang up as the central historical fact about which should be woven the adventures of a raw lad, kidnapped at the age of seventeen. The historical facts are that Colin Roy Campbell, a leading man in the great clan which supported the Hanoverian cause, was King's Factor for Appin, and in that capacity set out with an escort

of soldiers to evict the Appin tenants who paid rent to their exiled chief, Ardshiel. Colin Roy was shot from ambush by a man who was never brought to justice, though certainly his name was known to the whole country-side. Suspicion fell on Alan Breck Stewart, a notorious agent of the Jacobites, who went and came between Scotland and France ; but he was never taken. Ardshiel's half brother, James Stewart of the Glens, was tried on a charge of complicity, before a jury of Campbells, and was hanged.

In the case of this book, no dream gave assistance ; all was work of the waking intelligence, bringing imagination to bear on the facts presented by obscure passages of history, and by Highland landscape, which had become familiar to Stevenson and yet remained always strange to his lowland upbringing. But in this book, and in this book only, Stevenson tells us, " the characters took the bit in their teeth ; all at once they became detached from the flat paper, they turned their backs on me bodily ; and from that time my task was stenographic—it was they who spoke, it was they who wrote the remainder of the story ". I think it certain that this transformation, this sudden access of vitality, did not happen until Stevenson returned to the story which he had laid aside. For one thing, I do not believe that after it happened he, or any one else, would have stopped in the writing. Again, there are certain hints in the opening chapters which suggest that the original design was not carried out. David Balfour, after the death of his father who had been schoolmaster at Essendean in Ettrick Forest, sets forth by his father's direction to seek out an uncle of whom till then he had never heard—Ebenezer Balfour, at

his house of Shaws, not far from Cramond, which is near Edinburgh. The second day of walking brings David to speech of people who know the house and give it a bad name. The third of them is a woman and when Shaws—now in sight—is mentioned, she falls to cursing with a prophetic fury that immediately recalls Meg Merrilies in *Guy Mannering*: “ ‘ If ye see the laird, tell him this makes the twelve hunner and nineteen time that Jennet Clouston has called down the curse on him and his house, byre and stable, man, guest, and master, wife, miss, or bairn—black, black, be their fall ! ’ And the woman whose voice had risen to a kind of eldritch sing-song, turned with a skip, and was gone.”

Now an artist in narrative does not present a personage with that emphasis unless he means to make further use of it; and in the sixth chapter, when David is persuaded to accompany his sinister uncle to the Queen’s Ferry, there is, as would be expected, an echo of the incident. “ Nae doubt”, says the landlord of the inn, in reply to David’s observation that Ebenezer was “ ill-seen in the country”, “ he’s a wicked auld man, and there’s many would like to see him girning in a tow; Jennet Clouston and mony mair that he has harried out of hoose and hame.” At the end of that chapter, David, who has been enticed on board of the brig *Covenant*, is felled and kidnapped, to be carried off and sold as a slave in the West Indies plantations. The adventure develops of course very differently; but in all the rest of the book there is no word said of Jennet Clouston.

The story of the voyage round the north of Scotland and of the brutalities on board is powerful enough;



but I do not think that the characters "took the bit in their teeth" till in a night of thick weather the *Covenant* ran down a boat, and Alan Breck, having leaped out of the stern and caught the brig's bowsprit, made his appearance on board. Then indeed the scene becomes quick with vitality. David Balfour, certainly, is real from the first; but David Balfour is quite simply Robert Louis Stevenson in imaginary surroundings. Not of course, the whole of Robert Louis; the artist is left out, and the moralist is in consequence exceedingly prominent—a moralist who will go all lengths for a scruple of conscience. David's father must undoubtedly have been a near relation of Mr. Thomas Stevenson. But Alan Breck's father was quite a different gentleman; his name was Alexandre Dumas, and Alan is a younger brother of d'Artagnan, though he happens to have been bred and reared in Scotland. It is no disparagement to Stevenson to recognise this filiation; he says himself that the great scene in *Esmond* when Colonel Esmond breaks his sword, is "pure Dumas; the great English thief stole from the great and unblushing French thief". One man kindles his lamp from another, and there is more light. Stevenson knew and loved his Dumas so well that d'Artagnan was part of his experience, and he saw or felt that he needed a Gascon to show by contrast the Puritan's virtues. If he did the Gascon better than the Puritan, all the more credit to him; and he knew where within the bounds of Scottish history the Gascon qualities could be illustrated with historical fitness.

It is hard to have patience with those who dismiss *Kidnapped* slightly as a "boy's book". Let them throw *Kim* into the scale with it and then consider

how many English novels of the more adult variety can weigh against these two. There is no love interest in either, that is true, but in both the leading motive which the adventures serve to develop is masculine friendship. The relation between Kim and his old lama has of course a different quality from that between David and Alan ; but in essence, friendship is the tie that binds all together. However, it is far more relevant here to point out that the whole saga of the Musketeers illustrates the same theme. Four Frenchmen who have nothing in common but their valiancy are drawn by adventure into a friendship ; later adventures which they share make it indissoluble. The course of life separates them, but, remaining adventurous, they come by chance to be engaged on opposite sides in the same hazard, till developments of it bring them again to their delight into partnership. Once more separated over a long period of years, once more they find themselves, two by two, on opposite sides, but this time irreconcilably opposite. Yet to the end each of them will sacrifice his own hope of fortune and of safety for the sake of his friend.

Dumas, as his immense plan develops, gets further and further from verisimilitude ; but he never loses touch of this central idea ; and in carrying out his plan of historical romances, he does constantly help us to form a view of France when it was passing from the feudal state into organised monarchy. No doubt the view needs a good deal of correction ; Dumas was a great irresponsible ; but when all is said, he helps us to understand France. Stevenson, working with much more sober colours, and by no means so careless of accuracy, has illustrated Scottish history ; yet not after

Scott's fashion of linking individual fortunes to a main historical movement, which the story traces. Rather, he has made his tale pivot on a single minor incident, which in its causes and consequences was typical of the whole period. His powerful intelligence, working on what he had read, enabled him to realise how the whole moral code of a people may be perverted if they come to regard law as a machinery for their oppression. That was the case over a great part of Highland territory; obligations of law were not only without moral force, but the community developed positive virtues of loyalty and self-sacrifice in their resistance to law. They had the code of outlaws, and those of their own race and creed who stood in with the law were regarded as traitors profiting by their treason. Each code had its violent sanctions; killing was no murder, if the code justified it, whether the execution was done under guards in uniform, or by a shot from behind a heather-bush. Yet both sides were Scotsmen, of very different breeds, different even in their valiancy, yet having so much in common that the very unlikeness would be a powerful attraction in friendship. Each of the two breeds could produce a roving adventurer; Stevenson, though lowland bred, was the last man to need that this should be impressed on him; but adventure would call out in each man a valiancy particular to his race and upbringing; and he saw, evidently, how powerfully the unlikeness could illustrate itself in action and in the motives for action.

Scott, of course, had seen this before him, and in the *Legend of Montrose* he sent Dugald Dalgetty, a Scotsman of his own lowland stock, precise and pernicketty, the very pedant of military schools, to

make war among Highland caterans. But in that case Scott's chief concern was with the humours of the situation ; there is very little natural affection in Dalgetty ; only a trained courage and a strictly limited professional honour. No ties of affection form themselves between him and the Highlanders ; all that we get is the unlikeness. Rob Roy again is presented, closely juxtaposed with that excellent Glasgow citizen, Bailie Nicol Jarvie, and the two orders of conduct meet and touch and do not comprehend each other. Yet Scott knows and shows that to a certain degree the codes are recognised, across the dividing line. The bailie is aware up to what point he can trust Rob, though he may not himself share or even approve the reasons for which Rob is to be trusted. And the outlaw knows that in the last necessity he can depend upon the bailie to turn a blind eye to strict legal obligations, for the sake of cousinship. But when all is said, Scott understands Nicol Jarvie to the fat marrow of his bones ; the bailie is a complete and genial creation ; Rob remains a sketch, boldly dashed in, but realised, in so far as he is realised, only because through his trokings with law-abiders south of the Highland line he has acquired some of the characteristics of the Scotland in which Scott himself was nurtured.

No one who has read even *Waverley* itself will dispute that Sir Walter had sympathetic understanding of the Highland code ; at the close of that tale Fergus MacIvor's henchman makes an offer to the Court for his chieftain's life, and defends it in a superb passage which makes clear the whole system of loyalties and the spirit in which they were accepted. It is perhaps

only there, and only in the supreme moment, that Scott has completely presented a Highlander. Yet there is one story little known even to devotees of the Waverleys, and it is possible that Stevenson may have never read *The Two Drovers*. No one can read it without painful awareness of Scott's failing powers, but in this tale of two men, Robin Oig the Highlander and the big north-countryman from across the border, we have a quarrel which the Highlander does his utmost to avoid, but which when it is forced on him, leaves to his mind no alternative but disgrace for himself or death for both. Anybody who has read this story and has read *Kidnapped* will agree that in Alan Breck's opinion Robin Oig was bound to kill.

Whoever should set Robert Louis Stevenson on a level with Sir Walter would be liable to an angry visit from Stevenson's ghost ; none the less, Scott has left us no study of a Highlander which approaches in excellence to Alan Breck. Alan has all the manly virtues, except modesty ; he has even humour, which Scott denied to all his Highland characters, saving only Rob Roy—and Rob has a touch of Glasgow. But Alan's vanity gets the better of humour when his own pride is touched ; and there is nothing in his nature that checks him from being eloquent about his own valour—no more than there is in d'Artagnan. Now David has the manly virtues, too, but they are not so simple. Alan is the clansman, David is the citizen, who must always perceive that there are two sides to a question ; as was also the case with his creator. But neither Robert Louis Stevenson nor David Balfour was incapable of taking extreme and dangerous action, once his mind was clear. When Alan springs on

board the *Covenant*, carrying a belt of guineas (Ardshiel's rents), the captain and crew plot to murder him. David has seen already a cabin-boy killed by the first mate in a fit of drunken rage ; he knows that Alan is one man against fifteen ; but instantly he does his duty as an honest man, gives warning and confronts the chances—not knowing the worth of his ally. Then comes the fight in the round-house, surely one of the best combats ever described in fiction. Alan is seen, the Highland warrior in full plumage, terrible in action, but then strutting and preening himself and making a song about it—in which David's part of the encounter, for artistic reasons, is left out. But the story gives that part, not less excellently than Alan's ; the lad's terror, his first revulsion against the act of killing—which to a boy of Alan's breed would have seemed glory—are perfectly natural ; and not less natural is the slight resentment when later he finds that his deeds do not figure in the song. But brotherhood begins in that combat, just as—need one recall ?—d'Artagnan earns his admission to the famous quartette by coming to the rescue of the other three when they were hard pressed.

From this point on, it is perfectly true that the characters play of themselves ; there is never a word that does not do its work. Yet when after the wreck of the *Covenant* Alan and David are separated for some days, the story flags perceptibly. It has not the same verve, and one or two incidents do not really help on the tale—especially that of the dangerous blind man whom David encounters when he is making his way to the rendezvous for which Alan has left directions. Blind Pew in *Treasure Island* had been so

powerfully invented that a sort of hang-over was left ; and the incident is so vivid that evidently Stevenson's imagination presented him with it, ready made—too tempting to be rejected. It helps also to give a picture of the lawless unstabilised society in which David found himself moving, six years after the Forty-Five, when the Gaelic order in the Highlands was broken up and the new not yet established.

One may admire, too, the ingenious use which Stevenson made of his own familiarity with that outlying region, when he pictures the inland-bred boy marooned for several days on Earraid, starving and shelterless, because he does not know that every low tide leaves an easy crossing from the island to the other shore. This passage again does not really help on the story except by showing how completely a stranger one breed of Scotsman might be in part of his own country. The turning-point in the tale comes when David, asking his way from one and another, meets Colin Roy with his company of soldiers and is actually in speech with him when the sudden shot is fired. Sighting the murderer, he dashes off to lead the pursuit, but finds that he himself is being hunted as an accomplice, and that shots are being fired at him. This is the moment when he runs into the arms of Alan—who, Stevenson insists upon our believing, just happened to be there. David, in the confusion of his senses, does as Alan bids him, ducks and dodges and runs ; and for the first of many times in this narration, we have the physical sensations of a fugitive, depending on nothing for safety but his wind and limb ; and the flight goes on, committing David at every step to an outlaw's tactics. But as soon as

pursuit has been shaken off, and the two recover from the swoon of exhaustion, the moral issue opens ; and here we part company with Dumas. David has seen murder done, suddenly and shockingly ; the murdered man was one of whom Alan had told him much on board the *Covenant*, and told it with prayers for his killing ; and now the thing is done, " and here was Alan skulking in the trees and running from the troops ". David's first impulse is clear—" You and me must twine. I liked you very well, Alan, but your ways are not mine, and they're not God's ; and the short and the long of it is just that we must twine." The narrative (after Stevenson's usual preference) is in the first person, and David as narrator uses excellent English, with a touch of the eighteenth-century's cadence ; but he and Alan speak in Scotch. Except in *Thrawn Janet*, where the dialect is more accentuated, this was the first work in which Stevenson had used his " second tongue ", and he used it, after Sir Walter's manner, keeping the characteristic idiom and rhythm of the sentences, but avoiding unusual words unless when, as here, they had a special charm. I can hardly think it was ever necessary to have a footnote saying that " twine " means to part ; at all events no one with an ear will deny how much is gained by the use of it—how it conveys the desire that David had for their friendship and the bitterness of ending it.

Alan, to oblige his friend, draws his dirk and swears upon it that he had " neither art nor part, act nor thought " in the killing. But when, on this assurance, David offers to shake hands, Alan refuses ; he has no pride of innocence ; and very soon David brings him to admit not only that he would bear no witness against



the man who fired, but that he had willingly exposed both of them to draw the soldiers off the track : " ' For if it was the other way round about, and the lad whom I couldnae just clearly see had been in our shoes, and we in his (as might very well have been), I think we would be a good deal obliged to him oursel's if he would draw the soldiers. And that,' says Alan, ' is the good Christianity.' " The entire sincerity of these morals, even if they were all " tail-first ", broke down David's resistance ; a second time he offered his hand and this time Alan took it ; pointing out, as their talk continued, that David's notion of " trusting himself to the justice of his country " was a very poor one when a Campbell had been killed and the trial would be held in " the Campbell's head place ". " And what would the clan think if there was a Campbell shot, and naebody hanged, and their own chief the Justice General ? "

Between fear of the gallows, and inclination to stand in with his friend, David decides to follow the outlaw ; and so the long flight begins, with all its varying encounters and all the sensations of violent physical exertion and crushing fatigue—very surprising work of imagination to come from a man who had been through most of his life an invalid, and at the time of actual writing could barely walk a mile. Yet in his *Humble Remonstrance* he argues against Henry James that " the artist writes with more gusto and effect of those things which he has only wished to do, than of those which he has done ". Stevenson must have had as much desire to walk or run himself to a standstill in a chase for dear life as Dumas ever had to kill horses under him.

But the real merit of the story—which Henry

James, no great enthusiast for tales of adventure, counted Stevenson's best work <sup>1</sup>—lies in the relation between the two friends, always in danger from a fundamental disagreement. Alan, the clansman, is perfectly clear that from the moment when Red Colin dropped, the only safety for David as well as for himself lay in escape by flight. David, the citizen, is never convinced of this, and when the country is placarded with descriptions of them both, and offers of reward, he continues to ask himself whether it is not for his own interest to surrender. More and more he is moved by a loyalty to Alan, which Alan does not perceive. Then another cause of quarrel arises when they lie in the shelter at Cluny Macpherson's house; Alan gambles away David's money when David is on a sick bed, and though he asks pardon, David does not easily forgive. When the flight begins again, he rebuffs his friend till finally both their tempers are lost, and they go on, David dour and resentful, Alan malicious with taunts against the "Whiggie"—whose Puritanism he has never accepted. This is what Henry James chose to praise above all—the slow fraying of tempers under physical stress, the quarrel when

Each spoke words of high disdain  
And insult to his heart's best brother,

till they were at swords drawn there on the heather. But Alan, faced with the issue, flings his blade down. "It's fair murder. . . . Na, na—I cannae, I cannae"; and David, who even in his extremity can see both sides of the question, puts pride away in an appeal

<sup>1</sup> This was in 1888, before any of the South Sea stories were to be considered, or the *Master of Ballantrae*.

for pity of his weakness, which brings complete and final reconciliation. This is the climax of the book.

Five years earlier, Stevenson beginning to find himself had written to Colvin: "I care for nothing but the moral and the dramatic". Well, here was drama, the mounting clash of two temperaments; and here, as everywhere through the book was any amount of morality; the moralist dogs David like his shadow. But we get beyond morals into the fine unreason of human nature in Alan's closing words: "Just precisely what I thought I liked about ye, was that ye never quarrelled: and now I like ye better". After that, all is simply an unfolding of adventure, until—by Alan's shrewd knowledge of humanity—they win across the Forth and so to the lawyer who takes charge of David's interests; and this part of the saga is ended by a trick in which Alan has to play the leading part and which draws from David's uncle a confession before unseen witnesses of his conspiracy against his nephew. Thereupon, the Edinburgh lawyer (who is admirably sketched) very quickly imposes an arrangement which establishes David as a young man of substance.

But manifestly this is no more than a break in the narrative; for David is bound, as any decent man would be, to see Alan safe out of Scotland, and Stevenson never intended to stop until that was satisfactorily accomplished. Besides, the historical novelist who had undertaken a story dealing with the Appin murder, could not leave that matter hanging; he must, in fact, go on till somebody had been hanged—which was history's last word in the matter. We do not know how much farther his invention had gone with the

plot, but we may be sure that his mind was already made up about David's line of conduct. For David, a law-abiding young man, had seen murder done, and, knowing at least who had not done it, would think it his duty, even at personal danger, to prevent the law from hanging an innocent man. But at the moment the writer's energy was exhausted; and Colvin persuaded him to let the saga stop at the point to which he had carried it; so *Kidnapped* appeared like *Treasure Island* in *Young Folks* as another boy's book, in which women scarcely appeared, and never in a leading part. I have little doubt but that the example of Dumas was present to Stevenson's mind. When the *Three Musketeers* was finished, there were still nine volumes of the saga to be written. Alan Breck and David, like d'Artagnan and his comrades, could go into a rest-camp, and be called out to fight another day.

*Kidnapped* was published in July 1886, only six months after the appearance of *Jekyll and Hyde*. Two works so disparate have seldom come from one author even in a much longer space of time. The only things they had in common were the insistence on moral questions and the sobriety of their powerful style. When *The Merry Men* was published in February 1887, Stevenson had displayed almost within a twelve-month the whole gamut of his qualities as a writer of fiction. *Markheim* had close analogies with the moral allegory of *Jekyll and Hyde*; but the writing was more whipped up; and in the story which gives its title to the volume, his prose took on the colours of poetry. In *Olalla*, but much more powerfully (though in a different idiom) in *Thrawn Janet*, he showed his gift for conjuring up the uncanny and the grim. Through-

out all these four pieces the presence of madness or a mood bordering on it tempts him almost to overstep the modesty of nature. Realising the variety in range and in temper of this active imagination, it is easy to understand why Stevenson impressed so powerfully us who were his contemporaries. Moreover, in addition to the writings that were for his own proper purpose, he worked at this time for love on the biography of his friend Professor Fleeming Jenkin. "Skerryvore" was still his home, where he lived, as he put it later, "a pallid brute, like a weevil in a biscuit". Yet in the summers he was able to make small excursions either to join his father and mother, or to stay with Colvin at "the Monument"; and once he got so far as Paris, to revive old friendships and memories.

But while his health hung on a frail thread, he proposed an undertaking entirely characteristic of the man who set out in David Balfour a picture of the civic courage which will face all risks to assert the rights of just law. At the close of 1885, the house of Mr. John Curtin, a farmer in Kerry who stood out against the Land League, had been attacked; Curtin was shot dead, his sons and daughters, resisting stoutly, killed one of the "moonlighters", and stuck to the possession of their farm. They were rigidly boycotted, and found it finally impossible to carry on. Stevenson proposed, as a protest against this savagery, to take the farm and go down with his wife and stepson and occupy it.

The Land League was in effect a vast trade union of tenants, enforcing sanctions pitilessly as the English trade unions had done against those who were regarded as "blacklegs". Whether Stevenson realised this or no, whether he understood at all the Irish land question,

does not greatly matter—though his reading of Highland history had certainly given him knowledge that the tenants had been oppressed. But it is a fact that the operations of a secret society such as was active in part of Kerry produces a state of public cowardice ; and against this he was prepared to demonstrate at the risk of his life and other lives. He knew, of course, that anything attempted against him and his would have a startling publicity ; and this would have been so plain to all concerned that, had he carried out his purpose, he probably would never have been actively molested. If it had cost his life—as was very likely—the result could have been assigned to natural causes, even if difficulties of getting supplies had assisted them. Probably he himself foresaw this objection, even if others did not press it on him ; but arguments did not avail ; undoubtedly he would have gone through with the venture and borne his testimony but for one deciding fact. His father was dying.

Mr. Stevenson had failed not only in health but in mind ; he had not perfect possession of his memory or of his speech ; but the tenderness between him and his son increased all the more. For the winter of 1886-87, a house had been taken at Bournemouth so that he and his wife could be near their son. In the spring, at the very time when Stevenson formed this project of going to Kerry, the old man began to break up ; he was taken home to Edinburgh ; his son followed to be with him, but was himself prostrated with illness, and could not even attend the funeral.

This shattering of the oldest and closest ties brought about a general change. Against the advice of doctors Stevenson had stayed on in England in order to remain

in touch with his father ; now, both in Edinburgh and at Bournemouth, they were peremptory that he should seek another climate in order to have a chance for life. The alternatives proposed were a hill station in India or Colorado ; and he and his wife decided for America. His mother was to migrate with them ; and in August 1887 he left Great Britain for the last time, sailing for the United States, and—though he little guessed it—for a new dispensation, a new outlook and a new life.

The first signs of it were on the voyage ; unknowingly they had taken their passages by a cattle-boat, which called at Le Havre to take horses on board ; but Stevenson was in a rapture. " I was so happy on board that ship ", he wrote to his cousin Bob, " I could not have believed it possible. We had the beastliest weather and many discomforts ; but the mere fact of its being a tramp-ship gave us many comforts ; we could cut about with the men and officers, stay in the wheel-house, discuss all manner of things and really be a little at sea. And truly there is nothing else. I had literally forgotten what happiness was, and the full mind—full of external and physical things, not full of cares and labours and rot about a fellow's behaviour. My heart literally sang ; I truly care for nothing so much as for that."

He had come into his own and his own received him ; he had found his element. Eight years before, going out in the steerage, he was too busy with his own desperate return, too much concentrated in study of his fellow-passengers, to think of enjoyment—even if free run of the ship had been available for a steerage passenger. Coming back in another boat later, married,

barely recovered from mortal illness, and full of the meeting with those he loved and from whom he had been estranged, he had other things than the sea to think of. But now for the first time it captured him—the sea and the men who lived by it. With them the rest of his real life was to be made. Also, in America he was to have the first taste of real prosperity.



## CHAPTER X

### AMERICAN INTERLUDE

It was eight years since Stevenson, landing from an emigrant ship with very little in his pocket, had spent a day in New York, tramping through pours of rain from one publisher's door to another, and finding no comfort. Now, when his boat entered the Hudson, and picked up the pilot, word came that the pilot worked in partnership, and one partner had come to be called Jekyll; the other, notoriously less amiable, got the name of Hyde. And on the boards in New York two dramatised versions of the story were running at the same time. Naturally, reporters thronged to meet the successful author, and publishers were very pressing. Scribner's booked him to write twelve monthly articles for £700; and he was offered £600 for the American serial rights of his next story.

There were of course more human contacts in plenty, and St. Gaudens the sculptor secured the chance which he had long desired, to make studies for a large medallion, now very widely known. But the Colorado project had to be abandoned because the sanatorium, six thousand feet above sea-level, would be impossible for Mrs. Stevenson, who could not stand high altitudes. They fell back on a place in the Adirondacks near Saranac lake, which seems to have

had few attractions and many disagreeables. But his health improved there, and at Saranac he planned out *The Master of Ballantrae*—completing by “a final tableau in the icy American wilderness” the story of Jacobite times which he had “conceived long before on the moors between Pitlochry and Strathairdle, in the blend of the smell of heather and bog-plants, and with a mind full of the Athole correspondence and the Memoirs of the Chevalier de Johnstoun.” A sentence in what he wrote about *The Genesis of the Master of Ballantrae* illustrates his companionable methods of working. His mother was with him. “In the absence of my wife, who is my usual helper in these times of parturition, I must spur her up at all seasons to hear me relate and try to clarify my unformed fancies.” Meantime his desire for playing the professor of art got full chance to gratify itself, for Mr. Lloyd Osbourne had commenced author; before long, criticism changed into collaboration, and the two were planning sensational tales. Apparently *The Wrong Box* got written about this time, and was drafted in full by Mr. Osbourne before Stevenson put a hand to it; so that, unlike the later collaborations, it need not be considered seriously as part of his work. Whatever of him there is in it is a sort of aftermath to that early crop, the *New Arabian Nights*.

But Saranac was no place to stay long in, and through the winter nights there Stevenson and his family were in ardent discussion of a yachting cruise. £3000 had come to him under the terms of his mother’s marriage settlement,<sup>1</sup> and he proposed to invest most

<sup>1</sup> No conscientious scruple of the father could affect this—even if such scruples had lasted.

of this on an experiment—kill or cure. The Atlantic was first thought of, but then Mrs. Stevenson went to visit her friends in San Francisco, and reported by telegram that the yacht *Casco* might be hired for a cruise among the islands of the South Seas. Stevenson answered while the messenger waited, accepting; and by June 7th he was in San Francisco. On the 26th he set out with his household for a voyage of several thousand miles, on a 70-ton yacht, schooner-rigged, built and fitted by a millionaire for racing in Californian waters. That was the beginning; for nearly three years, as Graham Balfour puts it, he “wandered up and down the face of the Pacific”, aboard one ship or other. Europe never saw him again, nor America. He had entered into his inheritance.

No sharp line divides the work of his new life, considered as a whole, from that of the old; much of it derives directly from early studies and associations, though a wide province of what he accomplished, a still wider of what he attempted, was now opened up through immediate, novel and startling contacts. But the American period, lying in between the two larger divisions of his working life, belongs really to the earlier, in which everything was conditioned by the fact that he was an invalid.

In what was added to his output or gathered together while he lived in this half-way house, first comes the little volume of verse called *Underwoods*. It was published in August 1887, just after he left England; about fifty poems, and a third of them in Scots; some of the pleasantest had been written so far back as when he made the *Inland Voyage*. But

the two which stand out belong to the time of his first visit to America, and his slow recovery from illness ; these are *Requiem* and *The Celestial Surgeon*. In the first, there is no disputing the lyric quality ; but it is the lyric quality of an epitaph in the Greek Anthology. The other, written in the octosyllabic couplet which he specially affected (and which of all verse forms comes easiest to any habitual writer of prose) is, in the Roman sense, an epigram : it condenses a thought strikingly into harmonious phrases, and pins them to the memory by metre. The opening

If I have faltered more or less  
In my great task of happiness

lays down in brief words (even though three of them are added for the sake of rhyme) Stevenson's doctrine of life : We are here to live to our utmost : to do, not to avoid doing ; the close drives this home in phrases that clench like nails. If there is lethargy and accidie,

Lord, thy most pointed pleasure take  
And stab my spirit broad awake ;  
Or, Lord, if too obdurate I,  
Choose Thou, before that spirit die,  
A piercing pain, a killing sin,  
And to my dead heart run them in !

The same felicity is felt in the closing lines of *The House Beautiful* :

To make this earth, our hermitage,  
A cheerful and a changeful page,  
God's bright and intricate device  
Of days and seasons doth suffice.

Yet these are things which Stevenson the essayist might have said not less admirably in prose ; rhyme and metre only serve to make them more easily

remembered ; but the effect which he attained in *Requiem* could not be given except in singing words. Song is the expression of a mood ; epigram crystallises a thought. Very rarely—as in the epitaph on the Spartans fallen at Thermopylæ, or that other, so much more recent, on the men who from 1914 onwards “ followed their mercenary calling, and took their wages, and are dead ”—the condensed thought carries with it such a body of passion that epigram becomes high poetry. Stevenson never attained to this. Poetry came to him, as I shall have to show, but, most unusually, it came late—perhaps because the ordinary physical vigour was so long denied ; and at most it answered to no more than a mood—one facet of his nature—oftenest to his melancholy. *Requiem* got further than the rest, because it was conceived in a time of spiritual exaltation, when he had taken his desperate plunge for independence, and, with all the odds against him, was facing imminent and almost certain defeat. He put into it his personal cry of defiant acceptance :

Glad did I live and gladly die.

No man that ever lived was more preoccupied with his own personality ; all the poems which he wrote that have lasting value are poems about himself. It is true of course in a sense that every poet is his own subject, but only in an esoteric sense ; with Stevenson, in so far as he is a poet, this is literally true. The essayist in him, very closely related to the poet, tended more and more to be self-engrossed. His way of escape from these preoccupations was through the power of dramatic narrative, when he threw himself into persons of very different temperament, and dis-

played, with remarkable detachment and appreciation, motives and feelings quite unlike his own.

This early volume of verse has little significance, except for the *Requiem*. Nearly all of it may be described as exercises in words by an accomplished master of language. In the Scots poems I find nothing at all but the sort of glee in managing an unfamiliar medium—except perhaps in the verses to Dr. John Brown. These express the perfectly natural feelings of a hard-working professional author towards the amateur who makes one of those lucky hits, among which *Rab and his Friends* is a conspicuous example.

Ye scarce deserved it, I'm afraid—  
You that had never learned the trade,  
But just some idle morning strayed  
Intil the schùle,  
An' picked the fiddle up, an' played  
Like Neil himsel'.

Yet even in this very charming set of verses one feels a man showing what he can do—as it might be some accomplished scholar imitating the Horatian lyric. But in the novels, when Stevenson's characters speak Scots, there is never a trace of effort; and the stronger the emotion the more Scotch they become—within limits. Nothing in Stevenson needs a vocabulary to anyone brought up, even in the North of Ireland—except indeed the stories of *Thrawn Janet* and of *Tod Lapraik* which are pieces of deliberate virtuosity. But the character of the Scottish idiom could be preserved, as Sir Walter had shown, even with avoidance of the more unusual words. Stevenson (who indeed owned that much in Burns was “foreign” to his ear) followed Scott's example in his novels; in the verses he was perhaps over-inclined to show full command over the

vocabulary of Lallan. When he had to present an imaginary Scot, it came natural to him to think in Scots; but when Robert Louis Stevenson had to express his own mind, he could not do it in Scots without a touch of affectation.

At this period—after which he ceased to be an essayist—he was more than usually busy with the expression of his personal views. *Memories and Portraits*, his second volume of collected essays, was published in December 1887, while he was at Saranac. The latest of these papers to be written was the sketch of his father, which appeared in the *Contemporary Review* a month after Mr. Stevenson's death. *The Manse*, which came out in *Scribner's Magazine* a month earlier, described his grandfather, the old minister of Colinton; but from vivid memories of childhood it passes into characteristic reflections on the composite nature of man. He had all the Scotsman's consciousness of heredity; "ante-natal lives", he insists, still linger in all of us. "I have shaken a spear in the Debateable Land and shouted the slogan of the Elliots; I was present, when a skipper, plying from Dundee, smuggled Jacobites to France after the '15; I was in a West India merchant's office, perhaps next door to Bailie Nicol Jarvie's, and managed the business of a plantation in St. Kitt's." Then, evoking memories that come nearer home, he claims his part in the engineer grandfather who "sailed north about Scotland in the famous cruise that gave us the *Pirate* and the *Lord of the Isles*", and who steadied the nerves of his workmen in more than one dangerous moment while the Bell Rock lighthouse was building. Finally, reversing the process, he lets his fancy run back

through far-off and unknown ages to the remotest face of all that could be imaged "peering through the parted branches.—Probably arboreal in his habits."

*Pastoral*, another of the 1887 crop, is autobiographical too, chiefly a sketch of his friend John Todd, "the oldest herd on the Pentlands" who "spoke in the richest dialect of Scotch I ever heard", and must therefore be reckoned among Stevenson's masters in style. But it was his contention that men like the old shepherd had more to teach than manners of expression. The art of fiction, he urges, should appeal to ancestral memories, and not to our more modern life. "Novels begin to touch, not the fine *dilettanti* but the gross mass of mankind, when they leave off to speak of parlours and shades of manner and still-born niceties of motive, and deal with fighting, sailing, adventure, death or childbirth; and those ancient outdoor crafts and occupations, whether Mr. Hardy wields the shepherd's crook or Count Tolstoi swings the scythe, lift romance into a near neighbourhood with epic."

That represents what Stevenson had felt when he was condemned to be an invalid living indoors "like a weevil in a biscuit"; when expression must come to him through the medium of books. Editors prompted him, not unwilling, to talk about this form of expression, and *Books which have Influenced Me* appeared in the *British Weekly* just before he left England. His tribute went first to Shakespeare, then to Dumas, Bunyan, Montaigne and the New Testament—an odd assortment—followed by Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and then Herbert Spencer, no less strangely brought together. At the end of the list



comes his well-known eulogy of *The Egoist*—"a book to send the blood into men's faces. I think Willoughby an unmanly but very serviceable exposure of myself." In truth an egoist, but an amiable one, was displayed in each of Stevenson's essays.

When he began his monthly contributions to Scribner, the first was *A Chapter on Dreams* with the account of his "brownies". Then came *The Lantern Bearers*, which uses a reminiscence of his boyish plays to introduce a controversy about "realism" and romance. "The man's true life, for which he consents to live may lie altogether in the field of fancy"; and therefore literary pictures of "the submerging tide of dulness" and "the unfeatured wilderness of no existence" miss the life itself; "for to miss the joy is to miss all." This essay was greatly praised; but I much prefer the next, his discourse on *Beggars*. Here we meet an old soldier who "would walk miles to borrow a book, and that book always a poet"; a knife-grinder, eloquent upon "the tent pitched by the talking water, the stars overhead at night, and the blest return of morning". At the end come pregnant reflections on poverty and on charity. It is only from the poor that the poor get help, since help, to be real, can only come between equals. The truly charitable rich who have no friends that they can help as friends should not seek out charitable institutions; they may "subscribe to pay the taxes" and so practise a charity, "cumbering none with obligation, helping all.—But, alas", he says, "people nowhere demand the picturesque as much as in their virtues".

All these were excellent examples of Stevenson's quality as an essayist; but the possession of a regular

pulpit tempted him, and the preacher got too much the upper hand. "I was intended by nature to be a parson", he wrote to Colvin once, and it is what Alan calls "a sound observe." *Pulvis et Umbra* is pulpit oratory, rhetoric unashamed, in contemplation of the Kosmos: "What a monstrous spectre is this man, the disease of the agglutinated dust, lifting alternate feet or lying drugged with slumber; killing, feeding, growing, bringing forth small copies of himself"—and yet not merely barbarous: "rising up to do battle for an egg, or to die for an idea". But the thought does not stop there. If "this ennobled lemur, the hair-crowned bubble of the dust, this inheritor of a few years and seasons" can "live for an ideal however misconceived", why should we suppose that other creatures of the dust are without "the same cultus of an unattainable ideal, the same constancy in failure? . . . Are they, like us, in the timid hope of some reward, some sugar with the drug?" So the sermon runs, like many other brilliant exercises in rhetoric, to no very convincing conclusion.

*Pulvis et Umbra* was written at Saranac, while Stevenson could keep in easy touch with the editors for whom he worked; but once a yachting cruise was decided on which must take him out of reach of posts for considerable periods, a monthly menu had to be provided in advance; and it is worth while to consider the bill of fare. A good deal of it continued to be autobiographical; but in the main it was didactic. Stevenson, now that he had got the public ear, was not content to do good work, in the artistic sense; he must be trying to improve mankind—to be teacher and preacher. A didactic purpose dominates,

Three of the essays which followed *Pulvis et Umbra* in the motley procession, do not appear to have satisfied him, for they were not reissued with the rest in book form. These were entitled *Gentlemen, Some Gentlemen in Fiction* and *Popular Authors*. The first is moralising stuff; but the essayist descends from contemplation of the race in general to detailed observation of it in West End clubs or the steerage of a liner. For conspicuous examples of gentlemanlike behaviour he quotes two stories, one of Grant and Lee, the other of Wellington and Marmont; both show his wide study of military history, and the charming story of Wellington makes one regret that his projected Life of that old warrior remained unwritten. Then we have his selection of various but equally typical gentlemen: "Scott, Gordon, Wellington in his cold way, Grant in his plain way, Shelley for all his follies"; and, on the other hand, Napoleon, Byron and Lockhart, "cads, and the two first of a rare water". Yet in some measure he mitigates this condemnation, revealing himself as he does so. Apart from these interests, the essay makes heavy reading. But in the one which followed, *Some Gentlemen in Fiction*, we get the critic at his very best. Whether he writes of the limited means by which an author must present a character—mere words, without "the physical presence, the speaking eye, the inimitable commentary of the voice"—or of Shakespeare with special reference to Hamlet, or of Fielding as compared with Richardson, or finally of Thackeray as compared with Dickens in this special task of presenting a gentleman, he offers us delightful and most stimulating thought. Yet then, after reflections on the influence of books, linked with a compliment to

Andrew Lang, he winds up again with a note of preachment. However, the pulpiteer's voice is not heard in that very amusing piece of autobiography, the "Epilogue" to *An Inland Voyage* which, when the South Sea cruise was planned, he had evidently dug out of his bottom drawer to fill one of the gaps. *Contributions to the History of Fife* and *The Education of an Engineer*, chapters in the history of his own formation (reprinted as *Random Memories*), were also written before he set sail; he must have ransacked not only his store of manuscripts but of memories. So—for it was published in July—was *The Letter to a Young Gentleman who proposes to embrace the Career of Art*; and at a guess it arose out of contemplation of those early memories which recalled to him the writer himself in the first making. Henry James called this essay "admirable", and it deserves the word. Stevenson is nowhere more didactic or morally dogmatic than here, but it is on the matter closest to his experience. He discourages no vocation: "if a man love the labour of any trade, apart from any question of success or fame, the gods have called him"; let him follow his bent. But the reward must be the work itself. "In the life of the artist there need be no hour without its pleasure. . . . Other men pay, and pay dearly, for pleasures less desirable." Yet it has to be recognised that the artist who expects to be paid by the public has a duty to the public; he must please. "The first duty in the world is for a man to pay his way"; and if he cannot please the public with work that satisfies himself, then he can "desert from art and follow some manly way of life". For, in the last resort, the artist is brother to the "Daughters of

Joy", and like them must look forward to a grim future when the power to please has departed. Therefore, "if a man be not frugal, he has no business in the arts. If he be not frugal, he steers directly for that last tragic scene of *le vieux saltimbanque*." Neither is praise likely to give him any lasting satisfaction.

These were the conclusions set out by a man who had been surfeited with praise, and now was entering into solid prosperity. Justice is done to the attraction of the artist's life; but every illusion as to its rank in the scheme of things is drastically handled. Yet, to get his full view of the subject, other writings of his would have to be kept in mind. Stevenson never undervalued the importance of pleasure, and in the hierarchy of pleasures he placed very high those which come from the arts; and "of all the arts literature has the best opportunities of diffusing pleasure". In the collected volume, Stevenson emphasised his didactic purpose by concluding with the three essays in which that purpose stands out; first of them this *Letter*, limited in its application; second, the sweeping generalisation of *Pulvis et Umbra* upon man and the world; and lastly one whose title openly proclaims the preacher—*A Christmas Sermon*. Whether this also was written before he left the continent of America and the normal ways of life in which he had been reared, I cannot say: but it seems unlikely that, being what he was, he could have written thoughts for Christmas time among scenes so novel as he lived in from July onwards, and let no hint of the contrast appear in what he wrote. At all events the essay, designed for the valedictory at close of a series, was a farewell in more senses than he knew. From that

time forward, we are done with the essayist ; there is no more pulpit eloquence, there is no more discussion of the literary art. The moralist remained, but henceforward in Stevenson's work, we only get the moral through the dramatic. Till now, his main business, that of a writer of tales, had been supplemented by other activities of the mind, which were largely attempts to influence conduct by general argument. In the new life, Stevenson for the first time found exercises which lay outside the study ; instead of preaching, he could act.

But certainly when he left the pulpit he left it with a good sermon. It may have been contacts in America, where already the cry for prohibition was strong, that prompted him to denounce "negative morality" : "*Thou shalt* was ever Christ's word with which he superseded *thou shalt not*. To make our idea of morality centre on forbidden acts is to defile the imagination. Gentleness and cheerfulness, these come before all morality ; they are the perfect duties. If your morals make you dreary, depend upon it they are wrong ; I do not say ' give them up ', for they may be all you have ; but conceal them like a vice, lest they should spoil the lives of better and simpler people."

I greatly prefer this manner of Stevenson's to the exuberant eloquence of *Pulvis et Umbra* ; and I find this a far more useful sermon. It has a stoical side ; whatever our attempt, " failure is the fate allotted " ; no man can succeed in living up to his own best standard. Each is bound, in so far as he can, to make his neighbour happy. But then comes the question, how far must he give in to his neighbour ? Christ's sayings here are " hard to reconcile with each other

and (the most of them) hard to accept". Yet Stevenson is quite clear on one matter. We are to turn our cheek to be buffeted. "But when another's face is buffeted, perhaps a little of the lion will become us best. That we are to suffer others to be injured, and stand by, is not conceivable, and surely not desirable." From these clear cut simplified sentences, the sermon lifts at its close into a finely musical passage in praise of the decent average man, over whose exit may be written, "There goes another Faithful Failure". But for the last word of all, to express completely this mood of acceptance, he quotes from Henley's recently published book of verses, the passage at whose close come the lines :

So be my passing!  
My task accomplished, and the long day done,  
My wages taken, and in my heart  
Some late lark singing.

It was the finest salute that one artist could give to another—perhaps inspired by a sense that Henley and he, so near in intimacy earlier, had fallen out of harmony. Other friendships followed the wanderer to his new world, but not this one. At all events the sermon closes, as befitted its teaching, with a gesture of affection.

Two years later, when most of these essays were brought together for a volume, with the old record of his journey *Across the Plains* to lead off and give a title, he wrote to Colvin, who had selected and arranged them :

I agree with you the lights seem a little turned down. The truth is, I was far through (if you understand Scots) and came none too soon to the South Seas, where I was to

recover peace of body and mind. No man but myself knew all my bitterness in those days. Remember that, the next time you think I regret my exile. And however low the lights are, the stuff is true, and I believe the more effective ; after all, what I wish to fight is best fought by a rather cheerless presentation of the truth. The world must return some day to the word duty and be done with the word reward. There are no rewards and plenty duties. And the sooner a man sees that and acts upon it like a gentleman, or a fine old barbarian, the better for himself.

He had not permitted himself to own up to depression in the old way of life till it was over and done with. But all the work of these essays belonged to the old life, from which in the summer of 1888 he made his escape on a venture—to kill or cure. One matter taken into account in planning the voyage was that if this new experience proved to be more than he could stand, he could count on burial at sea.

For a clear month, from June 28th, when the *Casco* was towed outside the "Golden Gate", to July 28th, when they made their first landfall in the Pacific, all communications were cut between him and the world that he had known ; he lived under conditions that were to him strange, delightful and health-giving ; he drank in unaccustomed vitality, he began to be a new man. It was like an initiation.

Yet one fetter he carried about with him from the past—a great piece of unfinished work, and work which he was pledged to finish by a stated time. This was the most ambitious thing that he had undertaken since he came into full mastery of his powers ; a historical novel, but a novel in the ordinary sense, with the plot turning on conflict for a woman. *Prince Otto* indeed had been a novel, also in the same formal sense ;



but to name it in the same breath with *The Master of Ballantrae* is enough to reveal the disparity. If the two books were submitted among novels to one who did not know them, it would be a very competent critic who should recognise that they come from the same hand. Even the style would hardly be an indication; it is a far cry from the airy elaborations of *Prince Otto* to the grim sobriety of the mature worker.

In this case, as in *Kidnapped*, the seed had been long obscurely germinating. About the period when there was first talk of Red Colin as a subject for study, Stevenson's reading of Jacobite history had suggested to him the juxtaposition of two brothers who for family reasons (as frequently happened) engaged themselves on opposite sides, so that whether Hanoverian prevailed or Stuart, one member of the house could protect its fortunes. Six years later, after his coming to America, when another novel was demanded on tempting terms, he found himself in the sanatorium at Saranac where the life about him offered only depressing dullness; but his historical imagination was soon busy reconstructing times when the Adirondacks were a wilderness whose native population were scalp-hunting braves. It was then and there that he suddenly bethought him of utilising an Indian story of a man buried and resuscitated. This man, he decided, should be "a kind of evil genius to his friends and family" and should make his reappearance from the pit of death in "the icy American wilderness". Then, with another leap of the mind, he saw that this evil genius might be one of the two hostile brothers. So the tale began, part of it congenially nurtured by familiar

scenes and well-studied history, part of it marked with the sharpness of outline given when imagination works with what has fascinated by its very strangeness. As the dedication says, it had to be "a tale which extends over many years and travels over many countries; and as chance decided, it was begun, continued, and concluded among distant and diverse scenes".

The work suffered, as I must think, very greatly from this circumstance. How much was written before the *Casco* sailed, there is no means of knowing; but it certainly includes all that happened in the House of Durrisdeer up to the duel between the brothers; and probably all up to the Master's second return and the departure of his brother and sister-in-law for New York. Wherever and whenever written, the scenes that pass in the House at Durrisdeer are not surpassed by anything that Stevenson published in his life-time. Doubtless he knew this himself, yet he knew also the book's shortcoming. What is best in it may win our admiration; but it misses our sympathy. He has drawn for his principal character an accomplished and entirely heartless villain; a gentleman born, to whom the prestige of courage, breeding and intelligence gives natural ascendancy in all companies; who instinctively resents insult, yet is shameless, and knows it; who knows only so much of honour as enables him to perceive when a sense of honour in others leaves them at his mercy. We see him in relation to his brother, honest, plain, capable and courageous, but without charm, and hopelessly committed to a false position; indeed it is surprising that Stevenson, so much a moralist, did not emphasise that the whole

tragic situation flows from acceptance of a false morality. Historically, he is right; many a family decided that for the sake of the family it was necessary to have a foot in each camp. Henry, the younger son, with his plain honesty, sees the fact: "What are we doing? Cheating at cards?" "We are saving the house of Durrisdeer, Henry", his father said". Yet where a false code of honour is accepted, it can bind as firmly as the true; and at the later crisis, when the Master comes back for a second time, after his dishonour has been exposed to those immediately concerned, Stevenson pursues a true line of logic; the house cannot use its weapons against him without dishonouring itself. This gives a reason no less legitimate than ingenious for shifting the scene of action to America.

In this later part—carried out after he had started on his voyaging—Stevenson traces the spreading poison of hate. After Culloden, where the Master was believed to have fallen, Alison Graeme, Lord Durrisdeer's rich ward, the Master's plighted lover, consented, for the sake of the house, to marry the surviving brother—who loved her, as she loved the elder. The Master, established in France after ugly adventures, learnt the situation at Durrisdeer and did not spare his supplanter. Finally, having bled the estate white, when he could get no more by writing, he came home. There, by a process of slow torture, he kindled in his brother a hatred equal to his own, till at last, miscalculating the other's endurance, he brought the issue to blows; and in the conflict came defeat, which he had not thought possible. The defeat leads to exposure of the papers which show him as a

Government spy ; and when he comes back for the second time, the father, whose partiality had made much of the trouble, is dead, and the woman in the story, having her eyes opened, is all loyalty to her husband. The only traitor to him is himself. For when they have fled to New York, where Lady Durrisdeer owns property, and the Master follows them, thinking again to break the family to pieces, Durrisdeer has no scruple in a foreign land about showing the spy and the pirate for what he is ; and all the world is of his party. But that is not enough. He must feed himself with hate ; he must gloat on the other's humiliation ; he must even plot to have him murdered out in the wilderness. The moral which Stevenson seeks to drive home is that even the most deeply wronged will not be pardoned if he cannot learn to make an end of hate. That, however, is not a pleasurable lesson and checks the flow of sympathy towards the character to which it has been directed by all the narrative.—As to the wife, she, unfortunately, simply does not exist ; and this is perhaps the book's chief failure. On the other hand, Mackellar the steward, by whom the story is related, lives and is present to us, very likeably. We respect his fidelity and good sense ; but then he is no fighting man, except over a bargain ; and there is always a limit to sympathy for one who is even a little of a coward. Still, Mackellar is drawn with kindly humour, which leaves us in no doubt that, for the sake of his master and the house of Durrisdeer, he will face any adventure. But to choose him for narrator was to cut out all flamboyancy of writing or of sentiment. Stevenson loved what the French call *panache*—that martial touch of swagger which adorns

d'Artagnan, and adorns Alan Breck. His delight in this quality is contagious; but in *The Master of Ballantrae* nobody has any trace of *panache* except the Master. It is a bad affair for the novelist when the villain possesses charm, and the hero conspicuously lacks it: when, indeed, the whole trend of the story is governed by his lack of it. That essentially is why the book lacks pleasure, even in the parts which were artistically admirable. But it is not by any means admirable as a whole. There is unity of texture; what Stevenson called "the web" is well spun, but there is no unity of design; it is a thing of patches. As he found in *Treasure Island*, where the device of narrating in the first person is adopted, a complicated narrative imposes a change of narrator. It does not trouble us that Dr. Livesey should take on the tale from Jim Hawkins at a certain point, for Dr. Livesey's standpoint is the same as Jim's. But in *The Master of Ballantrae*, the man whose narration supplements Mackellar's comes out of a different order of ideas. There is, however, this much of unity in the design; narration is carried on, not as in *Treasure Island* or *Kidnapped* or *The Beach of Falesá*, by the principal actor; Mackellar is by position a subaltern, and so is the Chevalier de Burke, whom the Master chooses to be his emissary. We see the Master through his eyes as well as through Mackellar's, and there is much to be said for this scheme if Mr. Burke had been as well created as Mackellar. But that he certainly is not; and all his narration of the time when he and the Master, escaping from Scotland, were captured by pirates and forced to turn pirates themselves, is a mere tissue of raw-head-and-bloody-bones invention—dished

up in a manner which, as Stevenson saw himself, was modelled on Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon*. This part of the book does not tone in with the rest. At the end, when it is necessary to describe what happened to the Master, and what he did, when he was outside Mackellar's observation, there has again to be another narrator; but this time Stevenson decides that the trader's narration shall be passed on to us in what he calls the "homespun" of Mackellar's prose. Yet even so, harmony is not achieved; this part of the narration is improperly digested; and no wonder when we consider when and how it was done.

For a whole month the *Casco* was voyaging through solitary seas, sometimes in squalls, sometimes in calm; and then on July 28th land was sighted. From this time till the end of the year Stevenson cruised from island to island, and from one island group to another, ardently filling his mind and eyes with new sensations and ideas. On Christmas Day they sailed for Tahiti and returned to something like normal civilisation at Honolulu. *The Master of Ballantrae* had been running in *Scribner's* since November; so great was the demand for Stevenson's work that the Magazine allowed him this double appearance in two numbers—for his monthly essays only ended in December. But the manuscript of the novel was as yet far from complete, and having hired an abode outside Honolulu he had to sit down and finish the piece of work which had been broken off three thousand miles away and across an estranging gulf of emotions. It was work done against the grain; done all the worse because before leaving America he had accepted a contract to write a book about his travels, and his head was like a cauldron

into which masses of new and strange material were flung daily to simmer and stew down. Doubtless, as he wrote in his dedication to Sir Percy and Lady Shelley, "the character and fortune of the fraternal enemies, the hall and shrubbery of Durrisdeer, the problem of Mackellar's homespun and how to shape it for superior flights" had been with him on the *Casco's* deck, "in many star-reflecting harbours; ran often in his mind at sea to the tune of slatting canvas, and was dismissed (something of the suddenest) at the approach of squalls". Yet where all the world was so new, and so exciting, thoughts even of so strenuous a writer must have turned more readily in other directions than to a work of imagination which had no kinship with the surrounding scene. Gestation can hardly have been genial: and when the actual parturition had to be accomplished on shore at Honolulu, the task must have forced him to keep energies indoors that were wild to be off and about newer concerns.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE NEW LIFE

WHAT the South Seas did for Stevenson the writer was, in the first instance, that they gave him rest. He was born with insatiable activity both of mind and body, and physical disabilities denied him that change of occupation from indoor to outdoor which is the normal resource of active men. Through the main part of his working life, from the almost mortal illness which preceded his marriage onward, he had found rest only in passing from one piece of brain work to another. For such a man, a month's rest and recreation both for mind and body at once was no easy thing to come by ; some change which would end the ceaseless effort of putting thought into studied words and would give to the body a delight without exertion. Happily, he was so constituted that to watch on a voyage the day by day, night by night, pageant of sky and sea was occupation enough. Besides, he was not merely a passenger ; the ship on which he sailed was under his orders ; he had a personal interest in the *Casco's* behaviour, the way she stood up to a squall, the turn of speed she could show in favouring winds. So, for a full month, he walked her deck, or sat, or lay, content to let impressions soak into his mind without the craving to



turn them to literary account. The large leisure of the ocean embraced him ; doctors, newspapers, posts, were thousands of miles away ; no ship in all those thousands of miles was sighted ; events were only what the vagaries of sea and sky provided, and these carried with them enough of the sea's " genial dangers " to season adventure.

How complete the rest was may be inferred from the fact that this tireless writer has not set down a single word about the passage which divided the new life from the old ; indeed, from the year and a half spent mostly in cruising, hardly any record remains of his life on shipboard. Yet in 1892, at Samoa, after trying to reproduce in words one of the startling effects of tropic sky, he wrote to Colvin : " A ship's deck is the place to enjoy them. O what *awful* scenery from a ship's deck, in the tropics ! People talk about the Alps, but the clouds of the trade wind are alone for sublimity." Add to this one single phrase from the first chapter of his book *In the South Seas*—" The time of my voyages had passed like days in fairyland " ; and one can understand in what a swoon of the active faculties he lived during the long days that divided land from land ; one can understand how refreshed and recreated he approached the entry to a new life.

Not much in that book is likely to be remembered, but no one who has read it will forget the description of the first landfall, which " touched a virginity of sense ". After sighting with dawn the island of Nukahiva in the Marquesas, the *Casco* began to slide into the bay of Anaho. " The mark of anchorage was a blow-hole in the rocks near the south-eastern corner of the bay. Punctually to our use the blow-hole

spouted ; the schooner turned upon her heel ; the anchor plunged. It was a small sound, a great event ; my soul went down with these moorings whence no windlass may extract, nor any diver fish it up ; and I, and some part of my ship's company, were from that hour the bondslaves of the isles of Vivien."

The fate was unforeseen ; Stevenson when he set foot on the *Casco* had no intention of settling in the South Seas ; and more than a year after that first landfall his purpose still pointed home to European surroundings. The new way of life at first contact embarrassed him by its difficulty of intercourse ; here was a whole society, fascinating to his curiosity, from which he was cut off by the barrier of tongues. Yet where there is good will no obstacle holds ; the only one impassable is the barrier of contempt, and this had no more existence for Stevenson's nature than for two other writers whom he constantly calls to mind. Conrad writing of the Malays, Mary Kingsley writing of the West Africans, never for an instant lost sight of the unlikeness to European ways of thought in these other peoples ; but both attached themselves to qualities, like courage or the sense of justice, which are intelligible to all mankind. They could understand and interpret because they desired friendship ; and Stevenson also wished from the first to make friends in the South Seas. His way of approach came through his acquaintance with a primitive European society ; for in the islands lying off the Scottish coast he had known people whose habitations were far less civilised than any native hut in Polynesia, and he knew from his study of Highland history how much their clanships and their chieftainships, their feuds and their limited

loyalties, had resembled what could be still observed in the South Seas. Even their superstitions had a likeness. In no spirit of disparagement to either folk, he looked in the Marquesas for what he had found in the Hebrides, and he recognised the same courtesy, "the same plain and dignified hospitality". As his means of communication developed, he convinced the strange people that their ways would not seem to him matter for laughter or dislike. "When I desired any detail of savage custom, or of superstitious belief, I cast back", he says, "in the story of my fathers, and fished for what I wanted with some trait of equal barbarism . . . and what I knew of the Cluny Macphersons or the Appin Stewarts enabled me to learn, and helped me to understand, about the Tevas of Tahiti. The native was no longer ashamed, his sense of kinship grew warmer, and his lips were opened."

After three weeks' stay in the Marquesas, islands whose wooded mountain peaks rose into the clouds, the *Casco* sailed for the Paumotus, a group of atolls, where nothing rises more than the height of a tree above sea level, and thence to Tahiti. Here a long stay was made necessary, in part because Stevenson had fallen ill, and in part because dry rot had been discovered in the *Casco's* masts; and for two full months, he and his were the guests of a society in which the only Europeans were a French *gendarme* and a Dutch priest. The last stage of their cruise took them back to European society at Honolulu, where they arrived early in the new year of 1889. The *Casco* was sent home and Stevenson settled himself in a house four miles outside the town; for after six months' leisure he must return to work.

Something had been done on *The Master of Balantrae* while he was in Tahiti ; but there was still heavy labour before the last sheets were posted off in May—clearing off this commitment. But the other work which he was engaged to furnish had not grown beyond the stage of note-taking ; and during his stay at Honolulu he was enlarging studies for his book of travel and observation. With that purpose he visited the other islands of the Hawaii group—above all, the sinister Molokai, where he stayed eight days and seven nights in the leper settlement which Father Damien's life and death had made world-famous. It was not the way to find material for a light-hearted entertaining volume ; but what he had already encountered was grim enough ; for everywhere among the islands evidence met him of a doomed and disappearing race.

Seeking for more knowledge and more adventure, he set out in June on a 62-ton schooner, the *Equator*, voyaging to trade among the islands. The conditions of his agreement were that wherever they touched, he should have leave to stay three days on land. In this way he visited a group of "low islands", the Gilberts, which were then under no European control, and spent two months in Apemama, where a powerful native despot made exception in his favour to the rule which barred all white men from landing. From the Gilberts the *Equator* carried him, in December 1889, to the port of Apia in Samoa, which he saw then for the first time ; and since Samoan affairs had begun to have an international significance, he decided to stay here for some time and inform himself on them thoroughly before writing his book. His original plan was to

return to England by way of Australia while the book was being written; after that his life would be arranged so that his winters should be spent in Madeira. But soon the possibilities of Samoa for a winter abode presented themselves; a regular monthly post to Sydney and to San Francisco made communication with his publishers easy; and he decided to buy land in the bush only some two miles from the town of Apia, but six hundred feet uphill. Having settled this, with no thought of permanent residence all the year round, he took the mail steamer to Sydney, where he proposed to begin work on the South Sea book before sailing for England. But life even in an Australian city soon brought back chest-troubles, and his one cry was to get to sea. The only passage available was aboard a 600-ton trading steamer, the *Janet Nicoll*; and for several months he lived aboard her, in close company with the three speculative gentlemen who ran the venture. To them jointly was dedicated the book that he wrote about the South Seas, the fruit of knowledge acquired with their help. He had seen life of the South Seas from what Mary Kingsley considered the best standpoint to observe any native community—the trader's; he had visited between thirty and forty islands, and he had voyaged some thousands of miles before the *Janet Nicoll* brought him back to Sydney. From Sydney, in November 1890, he made his way by mail steamer to Samoa and entered on his life as a resident proprietor in the South Seas.

For two years and a half now he had (at least by comparison with his former activity) almost stopped writing. Still, he had finished *The Master of Ballantrae*; a good part of the South Sea book was

drafted ; and in 1889, during his cruise aboard the *Equator* talk with her captain suggested the plot of a story in which he saw reinforcement for his rapidly vanishing bank balance. This was *The Wrecker*, carried out in collaboration with Mr. Osbourne. Internal evidence proves that it was not completed till after the owners of the *Janet Nicoll* were old acquaintances, for one of them was admittedly the original of Tommy Haddon.

In 1889 he had published *The Master of Ballantrae* and (with Mr. Osbourne) *The Wrong Box*, books conceived in his old life. In 1890 no book of his appeared, and, except for one poem, nothing even in the magazines. But already his interest in the scenes and circumstances among which he moved had brought him before the public in a new character, as a publicist.

On February 10th, 1889, shortly after he first reached Honolulu, he wrote (dating his letter from "the Yacht *Casco*") to *The Times*, complaining of arbitrary proceedings in Samoa for which the German consul Dr. Knappe was responsible. Samoa, which at that time Stevenson had never visited, was nominally an independent native kingdom ; but the municipality of its principal town, Apia, was regulated by three consuls in joint authority, one German, one English, one American. The German, however, was acting as if he were lord paramount over both natives and Europeans ; an American and an English subject had been seized by German marines and only retrieved with difficulty. Stevenson's letter was less a protest against treatment of the native people than against the slight to British and American authority. No comment in *The Times* appeared. Yet clearly Knappe had gone

too far, and on Bismarck's proposal a conference concerning Samoa was held in the following June, at which it was settled that Germany and America should be jointly responsible for Samoa, and that a European Chief Justice should be appointed—with somewhat undefined powers. Dr. Knappe was recalled.

A year later, after the long cruising from island to island, Stevenson found himself once more in touch with European life and English newspapers. At Sydney in the beginning of 1890 he came across the *Sydney Presbyterian*, which contained a letter from the Rev. Dr. Hyde of Honolulu to his fellow minister the Rev. H. B. Gage. It was an estimate of Father Damien's life and work which Mr. Gage had thought it proper to make public. The substance of it was that Damien had been in life "a coarse and dirty man, headstrong and bigoted"; that he had no part in effecting the improvements inaugurated in the leper settlement; and, finally, that "He was not a pure man in his relations with women, and the leprosy of which he died should be attributed to his vices and his carelessness". Many men and women doubtless read this precious document with indignation: it is likely that some one of them may have called Stevenson's attention to it in Sydney. But none of them took action, for it had been published three months before he saw it. None of them, it is true, were so qualified as he to act. Very few indeed had spent, like him, a week in the scene of Damien's labours; still fewer could compare from knowledge that dreadful place with the comfortable house in the best street of Honolulu where Dr. Hyde carried out his missionary labours; and none possessed like Stevenson the ear of

the world. None had the weapon which in his hand demanded to be used. When a man is angry, power to wound is in itself a temptation ; Stevenson was too much a moralist to forget that ; and he was by nature more than usually averse from inflicting pain. He was scrupulous about obligations of hospitality and Dr. Hyde had been in some small sense his host ; there were ties of courtesy at least. All this he set aside without scruple ; but one consideration weighed heavily with him. If he attacked in so resounding fashion as he proposed, it must be at his own peril ; Dr. Hyde had his resource in the law of libel and Stevenson was lawyer enough to know the extent of this danger. He had built up painfully a prosperity which he valued in itself for his own well-being ; and he had others depending on him. " I made sure I should be ruined ", he wrote in a letter which is quoted by Balfour ; " I asked leave of my gallant family, and their consent made me feel every insult heroic ".

The thing is one of the most powerful pieces of invective in any language ; and it is distinguished from most of them by being in essence eulogy rather than invective ; a defence of Damien's glory rather than an attack on the contemptible Hyde. It is written with gusto such as one feels when Swift draws his pen to stab ; yet, unlike Swift, it avows the enjoyment. " With you, at last," Stevenson cries, " I rejoice to feel the button off the foil, and to plunge home." That is like d'Artagnan's flourish before engaging ; but the swordsmanship bears out its boast. He turns to his purpose the very breach of hospitality which might be pleaded against him. " It may be news to



you that the houses of missionaries are a cause of mockery in the streets of Honolulu. When I returned your civil visit, the driver of my cab commented on the size, the taste and the comfort of your house. It would have been news certainly to myself, had anyone told me that afternoon that I should turn to bring such matter into print. But you see, Sir, how you degrade better men to your own level." Throughout the piece one contrast is repeatedly pressed—Damien's dwelling among nightmare surroundings which Dr. Hyde, the comfortably housed, had not even risked himself by seeing. So much of the letter as concerned Damien's share in the improvements deals very frankly ; the man was no administrator ; he failed in bringing order, where others after him came in and brought it. On the other hand, it was Damien's achievement " by one striking act of martyrdom to direct all men's eyes to that distressful country. There is not a clean cup or towel in the Bishop's House but dirty Damien washed it."

The close of the letter dealt with what had no doubt seemed to Dr. Hyde and his friends the most damning count in the indictment ; and here Stevenson used to the utmost his familiarity not only with the scene of Damien's labours, but with South Sea life at large. In Molokai itself he had heard much criticism of the man ; but neither from Protestant nor Catholic in Molokai had this rumour reached him. Yet before he saw Dr. Hyde's letter he had already heard how at a public-house in Apia some stray visitor produced this as a piece of gossip, and how another of those present—not a man whom Dr. Hyde would wish to see at his own discreet table—had leapt up with a

cry : " Don't you see that if what you say was true, you would be a thousand times a more miserable little — for repeating it."

That is the emotional climax of this lay sermon. Stevenson sets Dr. Hyde's moral judgment beside that which was uttered in a boozing-ken on the Samoan beach ; he sums up : " You had a father ; suppose this tale were about him, and some informant brought it to you, proof in hand ; the last thing you would do would be to publish it in the religious press. . . . The man who tried to do what Damien did is my father, and the father of the man in the Apia bar, and the father of all who love goodness ; and he was your father too, if God had given you grace to see it."

No other of all Stevenson's writings is so complete an expression of the man himself. The moralist in him lay deeper than the artist, and the moralist did not shrink from risks. Yet even in chastising hypocrisy he has no note of pessimism ; the conclusion is, that example like Damien's may be lost on Dr. Hyde ; it is not lost on beachcombers. And very gladly he identified himself with the society in which Damien was defended, turning his back on the places where Damien was condemned.

For this congenital vagrant had at last found a way of life with which he could identify himself. Everywhere else, in Europe as in America, even in the country of his fathers, friends had seen him " pass, a wilful stranger " ; here, where all was transient, he inclined to take root. It was a land where all life was lived on the edge of the sea, where law was unsettled and every tenure precarious ; where life itself appeared unstable, between the native folk that were fast dying

off, and the white people, here to-day and gone to-morrow. But such life was adventure; and for the first time his faculty as a novelist exercised itself seriously upon scenes and actors of a world with which he had direct contact. The *New Arabian Nights* and *The Wrong Box* had belonged to a world of comic opera or farce; but *The Wrecker*, which he and Mr. Osbourne planned on board *The Equator* and carried out before the family settled down in Samoa, is definitely a study of life and manners for which Stevenson could draw on his wandering experiences—helped by the observation of a younger man who had assisted at most stages of the long vagrancy.

In these collaborations, the same method was observed as when Stevenson worked single-handed: a complete scenario, chapter by chapter, carried the story to its end. How much was drafted before November 1890, when the cruising ended, and "Vailima", the new home, began to take shape, one can only conjecture; but the actual completion was not accomplished till October 1891. "Only a long tough yarn with some pictures of the manners of to-day in the greater world—not the shoddy sham world of cities, clubs and colleges, but the world where men still live a man's life";—that is how Stevenson described it to Colvin, when it was posted off to Scribner's. By that time he felt himself to be living a man's life, and a full citizen of the "greater world".

The book opens in the Marquesas, and a prologue introduces us to the narrator—Mr. Loudon Dodd, American-born, sometime a student sculptor in the Quartier Latin, but transformed by the chances which

he narrates into "an old salted trader" among the South Sea Islands. With such a type Stevenson had no trouble in identifying himself. The actual opening may be taken for an ironic caricature of urban civilisation in its most modern form: we attend the Academy where Loudon Dodd is educated for the life of a speculative financier by a devoted father; and here, as so often in Stevenson, we are presented with the relations between a father and son, attached to each other, but quite unable to see eye to eye. However, after conspicuous failure at the Academy, Loudon Dodd is allowed to make for Paris, and qualify for the task of supplying the statuary in a building which Mr. Dodd senior has contracted to adorn. So we get some chapters describing artist life at a time when all the students desired to emulate Murger's *Vie de Bohême* "pursuing through a series of misadventures that extinct mammal the grisette" (surely an enchanting phrase). In these surroundings, Dodd encounters a pure-souled unsophisticated American, Jim Pinkerton, for whom pursuit of the dollar is the only true romance. Mr. Lloyd Osbourne has taken credit to himself for the character of Pinkerton, who at the book's first appearance was hailed with a delight which I find renewing itself after almost fifty years. How much is caricature, only Americans can say; but, much or little, the caricature is affectionate. Loudon Dodd is not caricatured, but through his story we are presented, dramatically, with Stevenson's conclusions about art. He is a type of the young gentleman who has inclinations to art sufficient to make him know the difference between good and bad, but lacks the irresistible vocation, and consequently does much better to go

where he can earn a living. That is the implication ; for in this book there are no preachments ; Mr. Osbourne's presence suppressed the moralist ; and the book is by so much the less characteristic of Stevenson. But it is rich in biographical suggestion ; the scenes at Paris and at Barbizon which (as we are told and might have inferred) are purely his work, bear testimony to his interest in the tale : Loudon Dodd's cravings for decent food and wine are rendered with the same intensity as David Balfour's hardships in the heather. We know also now that Stevenson put himself and his cousin into the picture as "the Stennis brothers", who "pour forth their copious tirades" ; gentlemen who arrive from London with nothing but great-coats and tooth-brushes, holding that everyone who has baggage remains "tethered by the umbilical cord". "It was expensive, to be sure, for every time you had to comb your hair a barber must be paid, and every time you changed your linen, one shirt must be bought and another thrown away : but anything was better, argued these young gentlemen, than to be the slaves of haversacks." So the successful writer, while his fine house was going up in Samoa, recalled pleasantly the kind of young fool he had been ; it is forty-one looking back on one and twenty.

Pinkerton is the link which holds the disparate members of this story together ; quite properly, since the born speculator in his pursuit of the dollar may embark on any enterprise. It is Pinkerton who, when art fails to pay a dividend, guarantees Dodd openings in San Francisco. So to Loudon Dodd, as to Louis Stevenson, San Francisco was the gateway leading to a new life ; for when Pinkerton and his partner have

bought on speculation a brig wrecked on some lone atoll, Dodd takes charge of the expedition, hoping to find a bonanza of concealed opium. He finds mystery instead, with murder in the offing. There is, it must be said, a great deal that is arbitrary in the invention; Stevenson had never troubled about probability in the *New Arabian Nights* and he did not trouble now; but this time, once you concede his central hypothesis of a fantastic gamble at an auction in San Francisco, the whole train of what followed is powerfully built up. The two men who planned the tale knew intimately the life of the Pacific; the picture they made of an atoll was no fancy picture, and their seamen, at sea or on shore, are drawn from the life.

A much finer book, Conrad's *Lord Jim*, would seem to have owed a good deal of technical suggestion to this piece of Stevenson's work, both in the choice of a narrator, and in the involved exposition, dragging out a chain of events, as it were, back foremost.

*The Wrecker* was the only large enterprise conceived and in part carried out during the period of unsettled wandering which began when the *Casco* sailed from San Francisco at the end of June 1888, and ended in November 1890 when Stevenson took up his abode on the tract of land which he had bought on the mountain above Apia. Here the house that was to be called "Vailima" was still in the building. Only four years of life lay before him, but he filled them with activities of which his creative work as a novelist was only a part. For the first time that specialised activity was nourished by the whole life of a man in an environment which he had chosen and largely created for himself. We can follow it through the monthly

budget which he wrote to Colvin—out of friendship firstly, but also quite definitely with the thought of ultimate publication.

He had to think of such things, for what he had created must depend for its continuance on the constant efforts of his pen. In December 1890, after many outpourings about the work of overseeing when a house was growing up, ground being cleared, and live stock established, he wrote: "The troubles of a farmer are inspiriting—they are like difficulties out hunting—a fellow rages at the time and rejoices to recall and commemorate them. My troubles have been financial. America, England, Samoa, Sydney, everywhere I have an end of liability hanging out and some shelf of credit hard by; and to juggle all these and build a dwelling-place here, and check expense—a thing I am ill-fitted for—you can conceive what a nightmare it is at times. Then, God knows, I have not been idle. But since *The Master*, nothing has come to raise any coins. I believe the springs are dry at home" (that is to say the earlier books were not bringing in any more returns) "and now I am worked out and can no more at all. A holiday is required". It was easily to be had:

*Nothing* is so interesting as weeding, clearing, and path-making; the oversight of labourers becomes a disease; it is quite an effort not to drop into the farmer; and it does make you feel so well. To come down covered with mud and drenched with sweat and rain after some hours in the bush, change, rub down, and take a chair in the verandah, is to taste a quiet conscience. And the strange thing that I mark is this: If I go out and make sixpence, bossing my labourers and plying the cutlass or the spade, idiot conscience applauds me; if I sit in the house and make twenty

pounds, idiot conscience wails over my neglect and the day wasted. . . .

I live for my dexterities and by my accomplishments ; even my clumsinesses are my joy—my woodcuts, my stumbling on the pipe [a flageolet], this surveying even—and even weeding sensitive ; anything to do with the mind, with the eye, with the hand—with a part of *me*.

Many another man of letters has found even working in an ordinary garden a temptation harder to resist than golf or race-courses—all the harder because of the primitive instinct urging that writing can be done at any time, but growing things will not wait. Stevenson had this temptation *in excelsis*. He was creating order out of chaos, driving out the jungle to put profitable amenities in its place ; and over and above all, there was the happy drunkenness of physical exhaustion, which through so many years had been kept from him and which he now found himself able to enjoy. It was like falling in love after fifty ; and moderation was never one of his qualities. Everything tempted him—even his besetting sense of duty ; for on top of all else, he must be schoolmaster, he must educate the young Samoan who was already a principal person in his household—or rather, as he would have preferred to put it, in his family ; there were lessons to be given in English, in arithmetic, in the use of the mariner's compass and what not all. Yet work proper, his own job, had to be fitted in. It is an exhilarating fact for other workers that both work and worker thrive on this regimen. His exuberant nature got the food it craved, and within a brief space of time he was producing with a richer fertility than ever before.

At the moment when this way of life began, he had two large undertakings on the stocks. One was



*The Wrecker*, at which he had to work single-handed, for Lloyd Osbourne had gone home from Sydney to bring out the books and furniture that were still at "Skerryvore" (Mrs. Stevenson, the elder, accompanying him). The other was that descriptive work on the South Seas which he had covenanted to finish for the American firm of McClure. About this he had no illusions; a bargain had been accepted "quite unsuitable to all my methods"; and he must only do the best he could. It was written and rewritten, some of it four times over, and appeared by instalments in *Black and White* from February to December 1891, but never during his lifetime in book form; and of all his many books it is the least readable.

What the publishers had expected, what no doubt he thought he could provide, was something in the nature of his *Inland Voyage* or his *Travels with a Donkey*. But it is one thing to write about even the least known regions of Western Europe, quite another to step out of "that comfortable zone of kindred languages where the curse of Babel is so easy to be remedied"; quite another to try observing humanity where speech is no help. Yet that is only a small part of the difference. In Western Europe man has never "escaped out of the shadows of the Roman empire, under whose toppling monuments we were all cradled, whose laws and letters are on every hand of us, constraining and preventing". The lands that Stevenson had now to describe were inhabited by "men whose fathers had never studied Virgil, never been conquered by Caesar, and never been ruled by the wisdom of Gaius or Papinian". In short, before description could begin intelligibly, so much had to be explained

that, unless he were to write like a mere cockney starrer, he must write anthropology. In substance, that is what he wrote. He was a highly intelligent and sympathetic observer, brought into contact with people who had become Christians, but whose fathers had been pagan cannibals; nominally ruled by their own chiefs under institutions and customs absolutely strange to modern Europe, but nevertheless controlled at every turn, directly or indirectly, by the power of Europeans. That power had virtually abolished native war: and yet all these societies had been built up on the assumption that war was a normal part of life. "From the most healthful, if not the most humane, of field-sports—hedge-warfare—as well as from the rest of his amusements and interests, the islander upon a hundred islands, has been recently cut off."

Mary Kingsley, going out with the purpose of an anthropologist, chose carefully those parts of Africa where European influence was only felt through contact with traders and to some small extent with missionaries; the customs which she studied existed in their primitive state; and very complicated indeed was the necessary explanation of these and of the beliefs which affected them. Stevenson, travelling for his pleasure, and his curiosity, found European customs and beliefs overlaying a whole network of pagandom, so that every influence was checked and thwarted by the presence of something alien and irreconcilable. The most that he could do was to make his readers aware of the complications. He brought to the work his trained power of visual description; he could make us see the incongruous apparition of a

devout and courteous island princess whose delicate hands were covered with a lacework of the finest tattooing. Neither he nor anyone else could have made simple all that needed to be understood ; but he of all writers was the most ill-fitted for the task. The great virtue in a master of prose was lacking to him—simplicity. He could tell a straightforward tale, in the first person, adopting for the purpose a nervous, unadorned method of speech ; whether the accent were to be that of the eighteenth century, somewhat precise and formal, or stamped with the slang of the South Sea trader in his own day, he could be simple and direct, dramatically ; but once he began to speak in his own character, all the mannerisms of an elaborate essayist appeared. As even the few sentences that I have quoted will indicate, he was never more mannered than in this book, where the flow of thought is least spontaneous. In writing fiction, invention provided him, automatically, with what he wanted, and only what he wanted ; but when selection had to be made out of a bewildering jumble of externally existing facts, his exposition might be ingenious, might be striking, might be admirably antithetic, but it was never simple.

Yet so much work done by such a man is never wasted, though the immediate effort may miscarry. Writing that book, he dug into his mind a store of race knowledge, which his " brownies ", his subconscious memory, could draw on for the work of imagination. Before his first year at " Vailima " was half over, he had written his admirable fable of *The Bottle Imp*—a story of South Sea natives, but of natives seen in their relation to white men. And in the very first days of

his slashing and hewing in the jungle, he had conceived a new story, which "shot through him like a bullet". This was a study of white men in their relation to South Sea natives, and its title became finally *The Beach of Falesd*.

As usual with him, there was a long gestation ; begun in November 1890, it was put aside as too fantastic—for apparently the first outline ended with some suggestion of witchcraft, though the opening was entirely naturalistic. But in the following April, having turned back to it, he fell in love with his first chapter. "It is really good, well fed with facts, true to the manners, and (for once in my works) rendered pleasing by the presence of a heroine who is pretty. Miss Uma is pretty ; a fact. All my other women have been as ugly as sin." By September he was still in love with his beginning but disgusted with its end, "a hallucination I have outlived" ; and then, a few days later : "The yarn is cured. No supernatural trick at all ; and escaped out of it quite easily : can't think why I was so stupid for so long." By the end of that month it had all been written and rewritten.

And now I don't want to write any more again for ever, or feel so ; and I've got to overhaul it once again to my sorrow. I was all yesterday revising, and found a lot of slacknesses and (what is worse in this kind of thing) some literaryisms. One of the puzzles is this—it is a first person story—a trader telling his own adventure in an island. When I began, I allowed myself a few liberties, because I was afraid of the end ; and the end proved quite easy, and could be done in the pace ; so the beginning remains about a quarter tone out (in places) ; but I have rather decided to let it stay so. The problem is always delicate ; it is the only thing that worries me in first person tales, which otherwise (quo' Alan) "set better wi' my genius". There

is a vast deal of fact in the story, and some pretty good comedy. It is the first realistic South Sea story ; I mean, with real South Sea character and details of life. Everybody else who has tried, that I have seen, got carried away by the romance, and ended in a kind of sugar-candy sham epic, and the whole effect was lost—there was no etching, no human grin, consequently no conviction. Now, I have got the smell and look of the thing a good deal. You will know more about the South Seas after you have read my little tale than if you had read a library. As to whether any one else will read it, I have no guess. I am in an off time, but there is just the possibility it might make a hit ; for the yarn is good and melodramatic, and there is quite a love affair—for me ; and Mr. Wiltshire (the narrator) is a huge lark, though I say it.

A year later, when he was at the final proofs : “ My admiration for that tale rises ; I believe it is in some ways my best work ; I am pretty sure at least I have never done anything better than Wiltshire ”.

The best judges have borne out this estimate ; and it should be remembered how much Stevenson, who in his historical novels followed a beaten trail, was in this a pioneer. Kipling, it is true, had already written some of his sketches which show Europeans in intimate relation to another race ; but the divergences there were between two developed civilisations, of which the European was not the older nor the more elaborate. Conrad, whose work has much more resemblance, had not yet begun to write. If the *Beach of Falesd* were compared with, say, *Karain*, there might be difficulty in forming a preference, though in that admirable piece Conrad's style is still infected with something of the French idiom, while Stevenson's was never more taut and vital than here. Yet what Conrad conveys is the exotic beauty and the human dignity of a way

of life, quite un-European even when seen through European eyes : whereas Stevenson is after what he calls " the human grin ". To get the " smell and look of the thing ", he slaps on ugliness unsparingly. Of the three white traders already on the beach at Falesá when Wiltshire arrived to take charge of his firm's store, one was a gin-sodden bleary old wreck, one a very disgusting American negro (in the South Seas negroes count as whites) and the third an accomplished scoundrel. Wiltshire himself was the kind of man whom Stevenson had met in a score of islands, and Mary Kingsley at a score of wharfs : he had been for four years alone in a store on one of the " low islands " " getting tabooed, and going down to the Speak House to see and get it taken off ; buying gin and going on a break, and then repenting ; sitting in the house at night with the lamp for company ; or walking on the beach and wondering what kind of fool to call myself for being where I was ".

As to the natives, his attitude is clear : " They haven't any real government or any real law. That's what you've got to knock into their heads ; and even if they had, it would be a good joke if it was to apply to a white man." So when, on Wiltshire's arrival, Case, the clever scoundrel, proposes to look him out a wife, he takes this as a matter of course, but kicks at the name of marriage, till he is told that it is only to be a farce, with the negro officiating. In that frame of mind, he meets the girl. Here Stevenson makes matters hard for himself. He has to convey Uma's uncommon beauty, and to convey it through words that are not out of place on the lips of a very ordinary uneducated man ; and as the story develops, he has

to convey Uma's charm and the nobility of her character, while making her speak in the trade-English "Beach de Mar". And he does it. There is no need to explain why Wiltshire falls in love. But Stevenson does feel the need to explain that Wiltshire is ashamed to find himself seriously concerned about the feelings of a native woman : shocked, in fact, to be telling Uma that he "would rather have her than all the copra in the South Seas".

In short, Wiltshire is a piece of humorous creation ; a jovial piece ; we enjoy seeing him knock Case down ; for that matter, we enter into the satisfaction with which in the last scene he drives a knife into Case's body, when the odds have been suddenly reversed ; we enjoy the gusto with which he approaches his demand to the missionary for a proper marriage with Uma. But in the end there is a touch of grimness when, contemplating the situation, the trader says good-bye to his visions of a public-house at the bend of an English road ; he is not at all clear what is to be done with the boys and girls that Uma has given him—more specially the girls : "They're only half-castes, of course ; I know that as well as you do, and there's nobody thinks less of half-castes than I do ; but they're mine, and about all I've got. I can't reconcile my mind to their taking up with Kanakas, and I'd like to know where I'm to find the whites." So the story closes, philosophically, on a question mark ; but it is none the worse for that. *Karain* ends on the same sort of question. Two ways of life, and which is the real one ?

The South Seas had given Stevenson *The Wrecker*, and had given him *The Beach of Falesá*. One came from the sea, the other from the beaches and the

mysterious jungle behind them ; but both were stories, essentially, of the men who frequented the South Seas ; both were stories inspired not by what Stevenson had read in books but by the scenes and characters that he had passed before his senses : hands that he had shaken, disgusts that he had felt, delights that his lungs had drunk in and made part of his being. The South Seas had given him a second country, and a country in which he could live joyfully.



## CHAPTER XII

### POLITICS AND POETRY

IF there were nothing but literary activities to record of Stevenson's years in Samoa, the tale would be bewildering enough. He plunged into stories of the life about him, life of the South Seas ; broke off from that to romances whose scene and incidents were furnished from his reading of Scottish history and his memories of Scottish landscape and Scottish characters ; shorter excursions into pure literature, poems and fables, made a recurring diversion. To these must be added pieces of political history from the South Sea islands, and of family history, concerned with other islands in a very different clime. But over and above all this, account must be taken of his energies as a householder, as a kind of local chieftain, and as an island politician. His personal establishment alone might have provided him with occupation enough ; there was the big new house, built of wood and roofed with corrugated iron—and no new house, planned to suit the fancies of an artist, was ever completely and finally finished ; there were the gardens and the plantations ; there was road-making ; and there was endless hospitality given and taken with Europeans and with natives. The latter was no small affair ; Polynesian

entertainment was on a large scale and Stevenson was not the man to be outdone, whether he made an occasional celebration for his own household, or feasted some of the island chiefs. The household was numerous ; some half a dozen servants indoors ; outdoors, perhaps a dozen men employed, perhaps thirty, as need varied ; but those who worked regularly for " Vailima " were taught to regard themselves as retainers and to wear a distinguishing tartan for their kilt. As head of the household, he concerned himself about all their affairs ; he assisted, he disciplined ; for a period he even assembled them daily for family prayers. Besides all this, there was continual coming and going to Apia and from Apia, the seaport town, especially when a British ship of war was in harbour there.

A man living so in such a place was necessarily a man of mark ; people came to him for help and for advice, both Europeans and natives ; and help and advice were the more sought because the island bordered on a state of war. It was not in his nature to be simply a looker-on ; even while he was busiest with his literature, he was asserting himself as an island politician, in opposition to a government which he considered incompetent, oppressive and unjust. This was well within his rights ; he had gone out of his way to establish friendly intercourse with the natives, learning their language to some considerable measure, and helped by Mr. Osbourne who had mastered it thoroughly, and his position among the Europeans was singularly central. They fell into three main categories—officials, missionaries and traders. The first of these had knowledge of the

South Seas, varying according to their position—the higher they were placed, the more completely ignorant. Missionaries and traders both understood the natives, but were little disposed to understand each other; Stevenson deplored this antagonism, and had friends in both camps. It was therefore natural that when a public protest was made against the action of the government, his name should be at the head of the signatories, and that he should have the task of getting them to stand together. The two officials appointed under the terms of the Berlin Conference, a Swede and a German, were both, it seems, personally amiable, but incompetent as rulers. Before they were appointed, the Germans had deported one king and left the succession in dispute; the new rulers had to choose between two claimants, and in Stevenson's judgment they chose the wrong man—certainly, the weaker. Their choice was not accepted by the bulk of the islanders, and some disorder followed, as a consequence of which a number of Samoans were imprisoned. There was talk of a rescue, and a rumour then spread through the island that the officer in charge was preparing, if rescue were attempted, to dynamite the jail with the prisoners in it. Stevenson and his fellow-signatories called the Chief Magistrate's attention to this rumour by a letter which Stevenson drafted, and asked for assurance, either that no such preparations had been made, or that they would be cancelled. An evasive and insolent answer was given; further enquiry produced only further evasion. Stevenson then sent a letter to *The Times*, setting out the facts and printing the correspondence. He had written before as an observer, dating his letter from a yacht:

now he wrote as one of the land-holders concerned for the peace of the island, and for the credit of European rule. This time *The Times* backed him by a leading article, insisting that the official who had written such replies as were quoted should be removed to some less responsible sphere. Since both the officials concerned were withdrawn in the next few months, it was natural that Stevenson's influence should be considered important; equally natural that in government circles it should be counted mischievous.

He meanwhile was determined to persevere with his appeal to European opinion: and since *The Wrecker* was now finished, and he wanted a change from fiction, he proceeded to set down the bewildering story of what had happened in Samoa during the eight years since the Germans began to assert domination. *A Footnote to History* is dated May 25th, 1892; four chapters of it had been drafted by the previous November, so that beyond doubt a deal of labour was spent on a work that could bring him in no money. From a literary point of view there is little to be said for it; the thread of the narrative is hard to follow; yet, unlike the book on the South Seas, it contains one chapter which will surely find a place in many anthologies. The tension between Germans and other Europeans which was described in Stevenson's first letter to *The Times*, written from Honolulu by March 1889, had reached such a point that any day one ship of war might fire on another. As a consequence, three American warships, and three German, were in the little harbour of Apia; the British *Calliope* was there also, to watch the situation. The harbour was (in Stevenson's phrase) such a creek as in Scotland

“ would scarce be dignified with the mark of an anchor in the chart ” ; but in the Pacific the weather has few surprises. This time also, the barometer gave full warning, but neither Americans nor Germans would budge while the political struggle went on ; the English captain misjudged the weather ; and a tempest caught them. Twenty-four hours later, six of the seven vessels were wrecked, with enormous loss of life ; only the *Calliope* by a miracle of luck and seamanship succeeded in steaming out to open water.

Here indeed was a subject for a descriptive writer and here was the writer trained for it. Every circumstance about that harbour is made clear to us—even to the dreadful detail of the undercut reef which condemned men wrecked against it to be drawn down into a monstrous cavern. All the seamanship of the long struggle for survival is brought before our eyes ; the *Calliope's* triumph, and the glorious episode of an American admiral leading the cheers of his crew for her as she scraped past between his helpless vessel and the reef at the bottle-neck. I quote only one sentence from what describes the fate of the admiral's own vessel after her engines were flooded and her cables had parted. “ In the fury of the gale, and in that sea perturbed alike by the gigantic billows and the volleying discharge of the rivers, the rudderless ship drove down stern foremost into the inner basin ; ranging, plunging and striking like a frightened horse ; drifting on destruction for herself and bringing it on others.” The rest of the story is of high nobility. The Samoans, who from the German standpoint were rebels, instead of falling on their enemies in that hour of disaster, risked their lives to get lines out to the

drowning men ; American and German forgot their quarrels in the presence of catastrophe, and began at least some attempt after a reasonable settlement. If it were only for the sake of that chapter Stevenson's labour was well spent ; and assuredly he grudged neither that nor the other labour of trying to get men to work together for the good of these islands. But Colvin, speaking doubtless for many friends in London, was perturbed about such a way of life and protested. Here is the answer :

Why, you madman, I wouldn't change my present installation for any post, dignity, honour, or advantage conceivable to me. It fills the bill ; I have the loveliest time. And as for wars and rumours of wars, you surely know enough of me to be aware that I like that also a thousand times better than decrepit peace in Middlesex ? I do not quite like politics ; I am too aristocratic, I fear, for that. God knows I don't care who I chum with ; perhaps like sailors best ; but to go round and sue and sneak to keep a crowd together—never. Hence my late eruption was interesting, but not what I like. All else suits me in this (killed a mosquito) *At* abode.

The literary adviser had little cause to complain ; in December of that year 1891 Stevenson wrote, after some labour on his *Footnote to History* : " No doubt this spate of work is pretty low now, and will be soon dry ; but, God bless you, what a lot I have accomplished ; *Wrecker* done, *Beach of Falesá* done, half the *History* ; *c'est étonnant* ".

A month later, when the end of the Samoan history was in sight—(designed for " a respectable little five-bob volume, to bloom unread in shop windows ")—he wrote : " After that, I'll have a spank at fiction. And rest ? I shall rest in the grave, or when I come to Italy.

If only the public will continue to support me. I lost my chance not dying; there seems blooming little fear of it now." He goes on to detail "orgies of work: five hours this morning; the day before, close on nine; and unless I finish myself off with this letter, I'll have another hour and a half, or *aiblins twa*, before dinner".

The "spank at fiction" was not long delayed. First came the project of *Sophia Scarlet*—"I blush to own it, a *regular novel*; heroine and hero, and false accusation, and love, and marriage, and all the rest of it—all planted in a big South Sea plantation run by ex-English officers". In short, it was to be a story inspired by his island experiences; but very little came of *Sophia*, except one page of memorable observations on the art of fiction:

The problem is exactly like a Balzac one, and I wish I had his fist—for I have already a better method—the kinetic, whereas he continually allowed himself to be led into the static. But then he had the fist, and the most I can hope is to get out of it with a modicum of grace and energy, but, for sure, without the strong impression, the full, dark brush. Three people have had it, the real creator's brush: Scott, see much of *The Antiquary* and *The Heart of Midlothian* (especially all round the trial, before, during, and after)—Balzac—and Thackeray in *Vanity Fair*. Everybody else either paints *thin*, or has to stop to paint, or paints excitedly, so that you see the author skipping before his canvas.

That was written on the 1st of February: before the month was out he had a confession to make. Three stray horses had got into his paddock: he decided they must be taken to the pound and with one Samoan helper tackled the job, got the delinquents to Apia

and was drenched with tropical rain on the way back. Colic followed ; Samoan journalism proved too heavy a task, and his mind sought its usual relief in change. " In the colic time I slid off into *David Balfour*." This latter part of the story, dropped five years before, went on fast : half of the book was done before March was out, and already he could send Colvin a list of other works planned. *Dyce of Ythan* was a story of 1750 suggested by Andrew Lang, " all about the throne of Poland and buried treasure in the Mackay country " ; Alan Breck and the Master of Ballantrae were to figure in it. Another historical romance, *The Shovels of Newton French*, was to range over seven generations, from 1650 to 1830. Then there was *Sophia Scarlet* also planned : there was *David Balfour*, not yet named *Catriona*, half written ; and, *The Pearl Fisher*, also partly written, a collaboration with Lloyd Osbourne, which became *The Ebb Tide*. He might well say that " except Jim Pinkerton, nobody ever had so many irons in the fire ". Yet two months later, in May, we hear of another project " *The Young Chevalier*, a story of sentiment and passion ". He made " a plunge at the beginning of this "—with some trepidation :

I am afraid my touch is a little broad in a love story ; I can't mean one thing and write another. As for women, I am no more in any fear of them ; I can do a sort all right ; age makes me less afraid of a petticoat, but I am a little in fear of grossness. . . . With all my romance, I am a realist and a prosaist, and a most fanatical lover of plain physical sensations plainly and expressly rendered ; hence my perils. To do love in the same spirit as I did (for instance) D. Balfour's fatigue in the heather ; my dear sir, there were grossness—ready made !



He had been up against difficulties with his *Beach of Falesá*; the publishers wanted to insist that Wiltshire and his Uma should be married properly before they spent the night together. "You will see what would be left of the yarn, had I consented", he wrote to Colvin. "This is a poison bad world for the romancer, this Anglo-Saxon world."

Very little was written of *The Young Chevalier*: it was only "a little holiday outing". After winding up his Samoan history and long steady progress with *David Balfour*, he wrote: "I wonder if any one had ever more energy upon so little strength. I know there is a frost; the Samoan book can only increase it; but I mean to break the frost inside two years, and pull off a big success, and vanity whispers in my ear that I have the strength. If I haven't, whistle over the lave o't. I can do without glory and perhaps the time is not far off when I can do without corn." By the end of September *David Balfour* was "done, and its author with it, or nearly so"; but he was happy. "*Falesá* and *D.B.* seem to me nearer what I mean than anything I have ever done; nearer what I mean by fiction; the nearest thing before was *Kidnapped*. I am not forgetting *The Master of Ballantrae*, but that lacked all pleasurable-ness, and hence was imperfect in essence."

Within a month of this review of completed labours, he was sending Colvin a first sketch of *Weir of Hermiton*. Surely, between planning and execution, very few authors have ever had such a year.

Yet throughout the whole course of it he was up to his neck in Samoan politics; the governing authorities wanting to get him out of the island, he wanting to

get them out. Four letters from him to *The Times* appeared between June and October. I do not think it is disputed that his complaints were justified; whether he did right to take on himself the duty of public protest was matter for his own conscience; but in considering his career as a writer, one is led to the conclusion that he gained in power by contacts wholly different from his literary work. The less bookish his life, the better his books became. "Vital, that is what I am at, first; wholly vital, with a buoyancy of life. Then lyrical, if it may be, and picturesque, always with an epic value of scenes, so that the figures remain in the mind's eye for ever." The first point in this high ambition, he certainly attained; and to help him to be vital, as a writer, the fullest personal life that he could reach was desirable.

*Catriona*, as *David Balfour* came to be called, was regarded with some suspicion because it was a sequel. I myself had always a strong weakness for it, although all of us must sympathise with the Lord Advocate's observation that if Mr. David "could cast some part of his conscience in a moss-hag as he went by, he would ride much merrier without it". However, David began as a moralist in *Kidnapped*, and now that he is (as Stevenson admitted) grown to be three years older in a matter of three days, nobody can expect him to be less priggish. That is a malady most incident to virtuous young men, and the story puts David in the embarrassing position of having to protect a young woman against her own kind impulses. *Catriona*, the Highland lass who rode as a child with her father beside Prince Charlie is (Stevenson wrote to Colvin) "as virginal as billy-o"—or, as David puts it more

romantically, "as clean as hill water". In reality, she is just as much a charming savage as Uma in *The Beach of Falesá* and perhaps, for all her pretty ways, not quite so attractive. The other lady, Miss Barbara Grant, the Lord Advocate's daughter, is rather like some character of Trollope's; a fine substantial piece of femininity, with her chaffing tongue and her good-looking airs and graces; one inclines to think that among Stevenson's fifty first-cousins there was a lady of this kind to be found—hearty, healthy, handsome and witty. Alan Breck turns up again, and it seems that the publishers cried out to have more of him in it. No wonder, for the last scenes, in which he has the leading part, are the best in the book. David comes out well in them too, and Stevenson does let us see the more satisfactory aspect of an honest valiant young man, carried out of himself by a clean passion for a girl who is worth it. Other figures in the book are worthy of an heir to the Scott tradition; Prestongrange, the Lord Advocate, kindly and able, but a politician; Simon Lovat, dangerous, unscrupulous and formidable; and Catriona's father, the Highlander gone rotten, a swordsman sunk into the bully and the spy.

Apart from the rest is the episode of David's captivity on the Bass Rock, guarded by a keeper, who beguiles the time with his story of Tod Lapraik. This is inset like Wandering Willie's Tale in *Redgauntlet*, and like that masterpiece touched with a vein of lyrical poetry; Stevenson stood to be judged by it as a writer in the Lallan tongue, and probably it is the best thing in a good book. But *Catriona* must always suffer from an anti-climax, because the whole reason for these later adventures is David's determination to

give evidence in favour of James Stewart, and though he gets to the Court, nothing after all comes of his intervention. It had to be so for historical reasons ; but Dumas would have cheated strict history.

In reviewing all this South Sea period, I have said nothing of the verses which were a sort of recreation all through it : things that could be worked at, or played at, away from desk and pen, while he was out slashing in the jungle, or riding his beloved New Zealander, Jack. There was a great deal of them : indeed the first things that he wrote after the South Sea Islands and the native way of life had swum into his ken were ballads, putting into English rhythm chants and stories current among his new friends. *The Song of Rahéro* is dedicated in a few dignified lines to Ori-a-Ori, the Tahitian chief in whose house he lived for two months while the *Casco* was being refitted for the sea. It is a long poem (more than five hundred lines in the old swinging seven-foot metre) and tells of a slaying, a vengeance and an escape, in which clan rises against clan. Nowhere else in his writings has Stevenson brought so vividly to my inner eye a vision of the native life : for instance, in his picture of the folk setting out with song and laughter to skirt the coast between them and the neighbouring clan :

Strong blew the wind of the south, the wind that gathers  
the clan ;  
Along all the line of the reef the clamorous surges ran ;  
And the clouds were piled on the top of the island  
mountain-high,  
A mountain throned on a mountain. The fleet of canoes  
swept by  
In the midst, on the green lagoon, with a crew released  
from care,

Sailing an even water, breathing a summer air,  
Cheered by a cloudless sun ; and ever to left and right  
Bursting surge on the reef, drenching storms on the height.  
So the folk of Vaiau sailed and were glad all day,  
Coasting the palm-tree cape and crossing the populous bay  
By all the towns of the Tevas ; and still as they bowled  
along,  
Boat would answer boat with jest and laughter and song,  
And the people of all the towns trooped to the sides of the  
sea  
And gazed from under the hand or sprang aloft on the tree,  
Hailing and cheering. Time failed them for more to do ;  
The holiday village careened to the wind, and was gone  
from view  
Swift as a passing bird ; and ever as onward it bore,  
Like the cry of the passing bird, bequeathed its song to the  
shore.

There is no lack of power in the telling of the grim happenings after this flowery prelude ; and the power rises as all concentrates on the figure of one man escaped from the ambush of fire to renew his race by rape. Yet Stevenson was attempting the impossible. Poetry deals most happily with what is familiar ; it counts on ready echoes in the mind of the hearer, on response of recognition ; and ballad poetry above all kinds abhors the exotic. Place and time matter little ; Kipling's *Ballad of East and West* is in essence the same situation as the opening canto of Scott's *Lady of the Lake* and goes home as easily to its mark. But where all is strange, where strange beliefs and manners and superstitions must be brought in for motive forces, poetry is hamstrung. Six generations ago Macpherson made at least the names of Gaelic legend and saga very widely familiar in English : for the last hundred years, scores of gifted writers have tried to make the Gaelic mythology material for poetry, and after all it remains intractable, because throughout it

causes for acting or abstaining from action are implied which have no validity to our judgments. Stevenson, like Kipling, picked a story where this lack of sympathetic response could be best avoided, a plain saga of cruelty and craft and vengeance, where there is no question of the supernatural or of tabu for a deterrent; yet in the end we cannot feel at home with the tale. The pleasure which it gives is not the pleasure of poetry; it has the pleasure of powerful and brilliant writing, but it lacks the simplicity proper to the ballad. "Arduous mountains"; "green continuous forests"—these and a score of other Latinisms offend. *The Feast of Famine*, illustrating Marquesan manners, is even more open to all these objections. How the ballad should be written, Stevenson knew well enough, and he had showed at least a familiarity with the traditions, when, during his stay at Saranac, he put together *Ticonderoga* and *Heather Ale*—both of them Highland stories. These are good enough, but plenty of worse writers have made better ballads. However, these two, together with the two long South Sea poems, and a short sea-going poem, *Christmas at Sea*—which is the best of the bunch—were brought out together under the name *Ballads*, just about the time when "Vailima" was purchased—five years after *Underwoods*, his first book of verse, had appeared.

But even then Stevenson had among his completed manuscripts several of the poems which he was preparing for publication some months before his death, and which appeared after it as *Songs of Travel*. Ten of them were composed at various stages of his voyaging before he settled in Samoa. Some of these are addressed in compliment to various princes, princesses

or potentates of the various islands—dignified and distinguished works, but only one of them memorable by its feeling—the brief lines to Mother Maryanne, chief of the Sisters of Mercy in the leper settlement at Molokai. Others are backward glances across “continents, and continental oceans” to unforgotten places and faces: they call up the forest, it may be near Bournemouth, it may be near Barbizon, in some fragmentary lines to his wife; they call up the “wild climate and the scowling town” of Edinburgh where he and the “Old Familiars” whom he addresses, “gloomed and shivered, sorrowed, sobbed and feared”; they call up the Firth of Forth where his own dead repose while about the coasts “their works, the salt-encrusted, still survive”; or Colvin’s home in London, “the many-pillared and the well-beloved”. All these have merit and interest which may keep them remembered till Stevenson’s novels are forgotten; but none of them belongs to that inner category of work in verse which survives by its own vitality and is known by many who could not name the author. Not a great many poems in each generation find admission there; but surely *Requiem* in *Underwoods* had already got in; and while he was still on board the *Casco* in the first months of his voyaging, I think that, fitting words to the tune of “Wandering Willie”, he added another to the things sure of survival. From the first line—“Home no more home to me, whither must I wander?”—to the last—“But I go for ever and come again no more”—it catches the note of a lovely melancholy. Better still, and more characteristic of the man, is that lilting poem which begins:

I will make you brooches and toys for your delight  
Of bird-song at morning and star-shine at night.

Vagabondage was his best inspiration, as in the lines set to an air of Schubert's :

Bed in the bush with stars to see,  
Bread dip in the river—  
There's the life for a man like me,  
There's the life for ever.

Or again, and this time it is surely the exile in Samoa who utters a cry for more than merely vanished youth :

Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,  
Say could that lad be I ?  
Merry of soul he sailed on a day,  
Over the sea to Skye.

Mull was astern, Rum on the port,  
Eigg on the starboard bow ;  
Glory of youth glowed in his soul,  
Where is that glory now ?

The first part of *Youth and Love* has less of this plangent singing note ; it is still the cry of a vagabond, but a vagabond who takes his vagabondage valiantly :

Hail and farewell ! I must arise,  
Leave here the fatted cattle,  
And paint on foreign lands and skies  
My Odyssey of battle.

The untented Kosmos my abode,  
I pass, a wilful stranger :  
My mistress still the open road  
And the bright eyes of danger.

It was my privilege to introduce Mary Kingsley to that closing phrase, and to see how she leaped at it.

All these, unless my faculty deceives me, will find their place in a hundred anthologies. Two others appeal to a more limited audience ; but it is typical of this insatiable artist in writing that he should write



a lyric on the lesser workers who must "resign the rhapsody, the dream, to men of larger reach", and yet can have their own reward, as they "skim and skim the pot".

Till at last, when round the house we hear  
The evensong of birds.  
One corner of blue heaven appear  
In our clear well of words.

The other is less modest, but not less winning :

Bright is the ring of words  
When the right man rings them. . . .  
Still they are carolled and said—  
On wings they are carried—  
After the singer is dead,  
And the maker buried.

Those few words may drift a long way, over many generations. Perhaps they may bring readers to another poem, less catching but more memorable—his *Mater Triumphans*; only twelve lines, but what a deal they say !

The ten fingers and toes, and the shell-like nail on each,  
The eyes blind as gems and the tongue attempting speech;  
Impotent hands in my bosom, and yet they shall wield the  
sword :  
Drugged with slumber and milk, you wait the day of the  
Lord.

These are the things by which Stevenson will take rank as a poet. His was one of the two-handed talents, but verse belonged to the younger hand : it is far less important in his total contribution than it is in Kipling's—though incomparably more important than in George Eliot's or in Galsworthy's, who also published poems. But there is a long list of English novelists, from Fielding and Richardson onwards down to Wells and Arnold Bennett, who definitely were not

poets ; it includes Jane Austen, Dickens and Thackeray. There is another, with Scott at the head, taking in Hardy and Meredith and coming down to Kipling—men who were poets undoubtedly, as well as writers of prose fiction ; and that is the list to which Stevenson belongs.

The two poems to his wife have only a biographical interest. In one he tells us what his lady should be like :

The hue of heather honey,  
The hue of honey bees,  
Shall tinge her golden shoulder,  
Shall gild her tawny knees.

The other has been often quoted, but the first of its three stanzas cannot well be left out in any book about this man :

Trusty, dusky, vivid, and true,  
With eyes of gold and bramble-dew,  
Steel-true and blade-straight,  
The great artificer  
Made my mate.

Five others remain to be considered, which are printed in sequence and probably written, as certainly the fifth and longest was written, in 1893, the last year which he saw to its close. All five are intensely personal and all are in a sense testamentary.

Life had begun to run less strong in him ; an attack of influenza in January of that year brought on a return of haemorrhage and imposed silence ; even when his brain was keen to work, he could not use his voice for dictating to Mrs. Strong, his daughter-in-law, and his amanuensis. Sooner than be completely cut off, he began at her suggestion dictating *St. Ives* in the deaf and dumb alphabet ! Then they went for a trip to Sydney, calling at Auckland on the way, and

in Sydney Mrs. Stevenson became seriously ill. Back in Samoa by April, they were "miserably anxious". By May that trouble was over, but all the exuberance was gone out of his letters to Colvin. It was probably about then that he wrote the five poems, or epigrams, of which one echoes a thought of Landor's :

I have trod the upward and the downward slope ;  
I have endured and done in days before ;  
I have longed for all, and bid farewell to hope ;  
And I have lived and loved, and closed the door.

Another is characteristically his own by its note of resilience ; "Farewell", he cries, "farewell, fair day so foully spent".

Farewell, fair day If any God  
At all consider this poor clod,  
He who the fair occasion sent  
Prepared and placed the impediment.

Let him diviner vengeance take—  
Give me to sleep, give me to wake  
Girded and shod, and bid me play  
The hero in the coming day!

The chief one, however, is quite simply a profession of faith or apologia—a last dying speech of Robert Louis Stevenson. For this he feels the need of rhyme and tramping rhythm, but cannot be bound by strict form. "God, if this were enough", he begins :

That I see things bare to the buff  
And up to the buttocks in mire,  
That I ask nor hope nor hire,  
Nutmeg in the husk,  
Nor dawn beyond the dusk,  
Nor life beyond death :  
God, if this were faith ?

Neither quite prose nor quite poetry, it nevertheless

expresses the man in his own peculiar, dogged, disillusioned quixotism :

To go on for ever and fail and go on again,  
And be mauled to the earth and arise,  
And contend for the shade of a word and a thing not  
seen with the eyes :  
With the half of a broken hope for a pillow at night  
That somehow the right is the right  
And the smooth shall bloom from the rough :  
Lord, if that were enough ?

However we may rank this piece of writing, there is no doubt it says what he wanted to say ; and no doubt that he wanted badly to say it. It is an explosion, and lacks something of the serene dignity which great utterance demands ; but it is vital utterance—the cry of a modern man.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE MASTERPIECE UNFINISHED

STEVENSON'S holiday outing to Auckland and Sydney, unlucky though it was, had some compensations. The larger world of Australia gave him reassuring evidence of success :

I found my fame much grown on this return to civilisation. *Digito monstrari* is a new experience ; people all looked at me in the streets in Sydney ; and it was very queer. Here, of course, I am only the white chief in the Great House to the natives ; and to the whites, either an ally or a foe. It is a much healthier state of matters. If I lived in an atmosphere of adulation, I should end by kicking against the pricks. O my beautiful forest, O my beautiful shining, windy house, what a joy it was to behold them again ! No chance to take myself too seriously here.

The other was of a comfort that he valued more ; it concerned his work, not as a writer but as a man. At Auckland he met Sir George Grey, then past eighty but still vigorous after a lifetime spent as soldier, explorer, administrator and statesman ; no one living had more authority on all that concerned the relations between Europeans and natives in the lands and archipelagoes of the Pacific. Mrs. Strong in her memories of " Vailima " has set down Stevenson's own account of what the old man said to him :

Pay no attention to attacks, go on doing what you are doing for the good of Samoa ; the time will come when it will be appreciated, and I am one of the few men who have lived long enough to learn this. . . . I thought you were an invalid. When I see the fire in your eye, and your age and energy, I feel no more anxiety about Samoa. . . . When I heard that a man with the romantic imagination of a novelist had settled down in one of these islands, I said to myself, These races will be saved.

Stevenson held that the business of art was to please, to entertain. Coming of the stock he came from, being what he was, it was inevitable that he should value himself more on what he did as a citizen than as an artist. The commonest comment on his intervention in matters of government was that a writer of stories had no competence in such affairs ; it was, then, a great encouragement to find such a one as Sir George Grey of the opinion that imagination was of service where the existence of another race was involved. Stevenson told Grey that he had put his hand to the plough and that nothing but deportation would make him leave Samoa. How much or how little his action influenced the course of events in those islands cannot be judged, and certainly no decisive effect can be claimed for it ; but one thing is clear beyond yea or nay ; he made a section of the natives feel that there was one white man at least who cared for their rights and stood by them in their distresses.

Things came, in the course of that year, 1893, to what Stevenson called hedge-warfare, rendered grimmer by the practice of head-taking, which neither the European powers nor the native chiefs could put down. Mataafa, who in Stevenson's judgment should have been recognised as King, would not submit to

the rival whom the European triple control were backing; and word came that his men were out on the war-path. Stevenson rode to visit the villages of that territory, accompanied by Graham Balfour, and at the second ford "came face to face with war. Under the trees on the further bank sat a picket of seven men with Winchesters; their faces bright, their eyes ardent". Further on, were more men marching with their guns and cartridge belts. At these sights, he wrote to Colvin, "the old aboriginal awoke in both of us and knickered like a stallion. . . . War is a huge *entraînement*; there is no other temptation to be compared to it, no, not one." But he must only sit quiet, in hope to be of use to "these poor people"—who saw European warships supporting their enemies. When fighting actually began, and the wounded were brought in, he had to arrange that the public hall in Apia should be used for a hospital: and he and his family bore a hand in the nursing and operations. Fighting was over in a fortnight and then the gaol was crammed with native chiefs who had to be fed by their sympathisers from outside. Stevenson with his family went on a ceremonial visit; he continued to supply and befriend the prisoners till the very informal incarceration was over, and then—in September 1894—a deputation of the liberated chiefs presented themselves to the family at "Vailima" to announce a proposal. This was that, as a mark of gratitude, they should complete the branch road leading from "Vailima" to the public way. They were to return to their provinces and collect their families; some were to live in Apia and ply up and down the coast to supply the working squad with

food; tools they asked for, but no presents were to be made. "Think of it," Stevenson wrote. "It is roadmaking—the most fruitful cause (after taxes) of all rebellions in Samoa, a thing to which they could not be bribed by money, nor driven by punishment. It does give me a sense of having done something in Samoa after all."

When the work was complete, a great palaver was held at "Vailima"; the road, opened with ceremony, was named "The Road of Gratitude"—or in Samoan, "The Road of Loving Hearts"; and Stevenson, speaking in Samoan, drove home what he called "the lesson of this road". "There is but one way to defend Samoa. Hear it before it is too late. It is to make roads and gardens, and care for your trees, and sell their produce wisely, and in one word to occupy and use your country. If you do not, others will."

We may leave it there and be glad that he saw that day. In the same month he was again writing on Samoan affairs, not now to a newspaper, but to a member of parliament, Mr. Hogan, who had been asking pertinent and persistent questions in the House of Commons; Stevenson applauded his efforts and sent him further documents; doing what he could do as a publicist while at the same time he did all that he could for the Samoans as a man living among them. "I love the land," he said to the chiefs in his speech, "I have chosen it to be my home while I live, and my grave after I am dead; and I love the people, and have chosen them to be my people to live and die with." It was an honest word. The ties that he had made for himself grew out of him, and held strongly. Yet these belonged to the man rather



than to the artist. For all that determined those things in his work by which he must be remembered, other links, not to be broken while life lasted, links not of his own forging, bound him to the real sources of his best inspiration. Crockett, prefacing his *Stickit Minister* with a dedication, one of whose phrases Stevenson caught up in a moving poem, called him "Robert Louis Stevenson of Scotland and of Samoa". Scotland came first, and came last. When he was done with *The Ebb Tide*, he was done with the Pacific; the months which remained, and they were fruitful, were all filled with vivid reconstruction of harsh people and rough scenery under unsmiling skies, of voices and faces and places like those among which he grew up, under the spirit of his unknown forefathers.

*The Ebb Tide* had a stormy passage before it got into the harbour of print. It was begun a year before his settlement in Samoa while he and his family were cruising from island to island, and the story, planned between him and Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, began to be written by the younger man. The opening chapters, Mr. Osbourne tells us, pleased Stevenson unusually and they remained as first set down, pitched very high in key; in fact more Stevensonian in style than anything that Stevenson had ever written;—a very curious example of the brilliant work that can come out of a master's studio, accentuating almost to extravagance the master's characteristic manner. The two authors had observed and contemplated the flotsam and jetsam of many beaches; and what they set out to tell was a story of human wreckage—described first at its most forlorn. Then a chance comes to the one among three derelicts who would be

useful and valuable but for his besetting weakness ; seizing it, he accepts command of a ship infected with smallpox, and brings along with him the Oxford-bred man, made useless by weakness, and the cockney clerk, too vicious to be employable. The captain's intention is, baldly, to steal the ship and her cargo ; her crew, all Kanakas, are not to be feared ; but after a hopeful start the plan miscarries because the sailor's weakness returns ; captain and cockney are drunk together and the Oxford man, no seaman, has to take charge of the schooner. Then things happen. All that happens on that voyage is invented by two men who had had their fill of schooner-sailing in those seas ; and the incidents are surprising and admirably planned. A new element comes in when the runaways make their landfall ; they chance on an unknown island whose existence was only rumoured ; and here the *deus ex machina*, a fantastic superman, sits waiting, to administer righteousness and judgment. I cannot think well of Mr. Attwater as a creation, and for this part of the book Stevenson is entirely responsible. It is powerful enough and pictorial enough ; it suits with what he himself called " the forced, violent, alembicated style " of the writing ; and when he read the book over in print, he wrote to Colvin, " I am afraid I think it excellent ". But judged by the standard which he applied to *The Master of Ballantrae* it should be condemned ; nobody could think it pleasurable. The best thing in it is Huish the cockney, hateful, ugly, a cad to the marrow, yet brave as a weasel ; useless for anything except crime, but in crime exempt from any scruple of decency or any shrinking of nerve. Captain Davies also is a good study ; both these

authors were good at seamen. But one never gets the best of Stevenson in the collaborations, and *The Ebb Tide* has none of the geniality which informs *The Beach of Falesá*; neither has it, except in the descriptions of landscape, the same confident touch. We are never in doubt about Mr. Wiltshire; Herrick, the Oxford man, often leaves us questioning, and Captain Davies sometimes, while Attwater we just do not believe in. Yet, in essence, this is a story of white men only; the natives are mere instruments; whereas *The Beach of Falesá* dealt with the complicated relations of native and white man.

*The Ebb Tide* appeared in September 1894, and was the last book that Stevenson published in his lifetime; thus he made his latest appearance as a novelist of contemporary life, laying his scene in the Pacific; and he has left no unfinished work in this kind. But throughout the last stage of his life he was mainly the writer of historical romances, of which the action passed almost entirely in Scotland among Scottish characters. *Weir of Hermiston*, as has been seen, was begun at the end of October 1892. Then followed in January a touch of influenza, and in the convalescence from that a new story, *St. Ives*, began to be written by a new method; it was dictated to his daughter-in-law. The hero is a young French noble who had taken service in the ranks under Napoleon, been captured and sent to Edinburgh Castle. "Merely a story of adventure, rambling along," he described it: "a mere tissue of adventures; no philosophy, no destiny to it. . . . 'Tis my most prosaic work." Since he completed thirty chapters out of the thirty-six which the novel contains (the last six being added by one of

his most gifted disciples, Quiller-Couch), one must take account of it; but not very serious account. There are first-rate episodes, especially that of the duel in the prison between St. Ives and another prisoner, with weapons improvised out of a pair of scissors, unscrewed and lashed to rods. Everything about this, the brutal insolences of the bullying *prévost*, and the chivalry with which he shields St. Ives after the death wound, are admirably invented. So is the whole story of the escape down the rock face from Edinburgh Castle. But throughout the book there is one damning defect: Stevenson is out of sympathy with his hero. He certainly did not share Wiltshire's views on the proper relation between natives and white men, but that did not lessen his liking for Wiltshire. He did thoroughly like the way in which Wiltshire was ashamed of himself from the first for having been a party to tricking Uma into a sham marriage; and he thoroughly liked the man who told her that he would sooner have her than all the copra in the South Seas. St. Ives is a refined gentleman, in love at sight with a beautiful young woman who comes to visit the prisoners; but he is an accomplished young Frenchman, fully aware of his personal attractions, and ready with ingenious plans to captivate and subjugate. Stevenson presents all this with humour, just as he presented David Balfour's awkwardness among the ladies; but in David's case, the humour is kindly; in the other, perhaps not quite. Stevenson knew France and Frenchmen very well and liked them, but there were things about Frenchmen that he did not like. He could not forgive Burns for talking of himself complacently as "an old hawk" among the women,

and that attitude of mind is not unusual among Frenchmen. Anxious to draw not merely a man, but a Frenchman, he stressed this trait, not realising that he was stressing in his hero the things that he himself disliked. For although, so far as we can judge, he set no very great store by chastity in men, it is clear enough that grossness disgusted him, and that he was still more intolerant of any approach to Don Juanism. *St. Ives* goes honestly about his love-making, but he has a little too much the air of a hero accustomed to conquer for Stevenson to approve. It is true that Alan Breck has a way with him among the women, and Stevenson delights to show this in contrast to David's clumsiness; but then he does not show us Alan making love. Yet if he did, it would be a Scotsman's love-making: what we feel in *St. Ives*, and probably were not meant to feel, is a Scotsman's resentment against the Latin point of view in matters where sex is concerned.

The same complex is to be discerned in the fragment of *The Young Chevalier*, written in 1892. Two Scotsmen make the leading characters in that opening; one of them is the hero, Balmile, the other an old acquaintance, the Master of Ballantrae, and the scene is an inn at Avignon where the gigantic amorous inn-keeper has a beautiful wife. The Master is full of Don Juanism, for the black-haired Provençale shows interest in the two well-dressed strangers; and before the chapter ends Balmile, who has resented the Master's tone, is interposing to protect the hostess from some violence of her husband's. So foundations are laid for a story of fierce southern passion, since the woman in that moment has leapt into savage

aversion for her husband and blazing love for the cold northern noble. What was finished of the next chapter introduces the Young Pretender himself—slightly in his cups. But the whole seems pitched in too high a key, and there is nothing to regret about the check to this enterprise.

I have very different feelings about *Heathercat*, which was begun at the end of 1893, as a change from *St. Ives*; and very complete the change was from the airs and graces of a gay young Frenchman to Presbyterian zealots of the "killing times" in Scotland of the seventeenth century. With amazing vividness of memory Stevenson conjures up the grey skies of the Border and the bleak "moors where the wild fowl consorted, the low gurgling pool of the trout, and the high windy place of the calling curlews". He reproduces the grim cadences of Covenanting speech; yet in among the fanatics are quiet, would-be peaceable human beings; the laird, whose whole desire is to keep the old house of Montroymont over his head, while his wife is mad for martyrdom, and the conforming minister, fond of his fiddle and a glass and a lass, while his former class-fellow, bearded, haggard and savage as any of the cursing prophets, lies hid in Montroymont. Among these conflicting characters comes and goes the son of the house, an adventurous youngster, called Heathercat because he has been so much employed to run messages unseen by the dragoons, and to "stand sentry on the skyline above a conventicle". And a conventicle is in progress under the windiest, most forlorn weather when the tale suddenly breaks off. Here, if ever, Stevenson was perfectly at home with his theme: you can read

these pages after reading *Old Mortality*, and think none the less of them. Such persons as (like Stevenson himself) know what Scott was worth at his best will realise that this is a big word. But one thing is noticeable: Scott's inner sympathies were against the Covenanters; Stevenson's were for them: he remained "Cummie's" nursling to the last.

There remains now to deal with the work by which, though barely half completed, all who care for Stevenson desire him to be judged. I speak for myself, but am sure that my feeling was that of hundreds when, two years after the man's death, *Weir of Hermiston* appeared as a book. It was exultation. We had been right—we who believed that this man to whom in his long effort our hearts had gone out, would some day produce work of unchallengeable greatness. More than forty years since then have brought me much reading and some experience, but have not altered that judgment; the pleasure of renewal is not less than the pleasure of first contact.

Certainly unfinished work cannot be ranked with completeness; but in what was finished we have already portraits of several contrasted persons which can be set beside any work of the great masters in this kind. Chief among them is the figure which dominates the book—Weir, the Lord Justice Clerk, able, upright, fearless, masterful to overbearing and without bowels of compassion; brutal in his mirth, gross in his enjoyments, yet a man not only feared but respected by those of valid judgment. We are made to see him first in relation to his "trembling wife"; for he was one who in choice of a mate "looked rather to obedience than to beauty"—assuming of course pro-

vision of ready money and broad acres. In a few vivid strokes Stevenson sketches the household which resulted, in George Square where the Adam brothers had just finished their work. Outside of Edinburgh, at Hermiston on the Lammermuirs, things went better, because Kirstie Elliott was in charge of the housekeeping there. But one thing was inevitable, that in such a household, the child born—an only son—should be his mother's, not his father's; and the mother was a Covenanting devotee like the lady in *Heathercat*. But in *Heathercat* the lady was masterful and the man meek, whereas Mrs. Weir scarcely breathed in her lord's presence. The boy Archie grew up nourished on stories of the martyred saints, and of bloody-minded persecutions, though Mrs. Weir knew well, even if the mob had not bawled it in the streets, that Hermiston, the "hanging judge" would have been a chief among persecutors. So, when she died, she left a boy inclined to sit in judgment on his father.

We have seen the man first in relation to his wife; we begin now to see him through the eyes of a lad who grows up under his roof, a complete and hostile stranger. All the writing is elaborate and mannered to a fault: but whenever Weir himself opens his mouth, there is a sudden shock of reality, and the whole atmosphere tingles with that gross, overbearing presence. In these conflicts between father and son which recur in Stevenson's work, there is always an urgent desire for fair play, and here the novelist helps himself out by the intervention of what in French comedies is called a *regardeur*. The affectionate looker-on, Lord Glenalmond, Weir's colleague on the



bench, is charmingly presented—an old scholar and recluse, shrinking, as Archie shrinks, from every touch of grossness, but aware of the coarser man's greatness. So, in the first section of the book, after the relation between father and son has been fully indicated, we have Archie's presence in court while the hanging judge hounds a misbegotten caitiff to the gallows with flouts and jeers; at the actual hanging we have Archie's hysterical cry of protest against a "God-defying murder"; we have the scene in the rooms of the "Speculative" (sketched with a caress of memory) when Archie proposes for debate the question "Whether capital punishment is consistent with God's will or man's policy"; and we have the buzz of rumour over these defiances skilfully indicated through the intervention of a college companion, Frank Innes, who is to figure largely in the tale. But then Stevenson begins to build up the other side of the case: first by the warning of a doctor who sees Archie looking ill and overwrought and conveys, with skilful understatement, that Hermiston, underneath his ironbound demeanour, has a passionate interest in the son of his loins. Archie (very nearly related to his creator in fiction) has an instant willingness to revise harsh judgments, and it is under the impression of the doctor's words that he faces his father when the big man summons him to judgment. Then comes, literally, a tremendous scene. Every utterance of Hermiston's is like the hot breath of an angry bull; there is a physical impact from the words, even in cold print; yet there is no loss of control. In every sentence the sense is conveyed of a restrained and measured power which strikes, like a steam hammer,

only so much as is necessary. The thing mastered is not Archie's courage but his mind ; convicted in his own eyes of folly and of impotence, he submits, and is ordered away from the bar, and on to the land, to oversee the farm at Hermiston.

Not a word is said to extenuate the humiliation ; but when Archie, dejected and broken, goes with his trouble to old Glenalmond, he finds comfort in a wisdom that can see both sides ; he has already pledged himself to a willing and loyal obedience before another judge comes in, jubilant over the scandal ; and before this incarnation of unpleasant commentary Archie makes apology.

Then we are done with Edinburgh and the scene shifts to Hermiston, the big house of a lonely parish out in the Lammermuirs ; and here we meet the family of border farmers through whom the tragic event is to evolve. They are Elliotts—a name that runs through all the rough Border story ; not gentle folk but what across the Border would be called yeomen, owning their own farm at Cauldstaneslap, and their land marches with the lands of Hermiston. One of them, Kirstie the elder, took service with her distant kindred the Rutherfords, and when Adam Weir the lawyer married Jean Rutherford, Kirstie went as house-keeper to Hermiston and had a hand in bringing up the boy Archie. But Cauldstaneslap was farmed by her older half-brother, Gilbert, till on a night as he rode back from market, heavy with drink and money, six men waylaid him at a ford. He had only his cudgel but he won through to his yard gate, where the horse dropped and he himself fell at the threshold ; but the bag of money was still at his belt and he had strength

enough to cry out the place where he had been beset. The four sons caught up the cry, and the way they dealt with that feud got them the name of the Four Black Brothers. "I care more and more now only for naked writing", Stevenson wrote to Colvin; and here the writing is naked as the saga of *Burnt Njal*. All the body of the book is in what he called a "constipated mosaic manner", with no thought of ease or fluency, word dovetailed in with word like blocks in a strong building. Freedom of utterance comes only when his characters speak, and here Kirstie tells the story. She dominates the later part of what is left, as *Hermiston* lowers over the earlier; and in her Stevenson has tackled a study for which I cannot recall any parallel in fiction. She is a retainer in the house, a servant in authority over others, but still a servant; she is fifty years old; but none the less when Archie, whom she had corrected as a child, comes back as a young man to take charge, she falls in love with her young master. It would be hard to overpraise the way in which this passion—for it is no less—has been handled. Kirstie who has been "a moorland Helen", keeps the superb lines of her body; she keeps, above all, the splendour of her golden hair; we are made to feel that age has not yet tamed her unmated blood. But if all her longing goes out to the young man, it is simply for the "rich physical pleasure" of serving him and of being glorified by his presence; her best reward is in a few minutes' talk when she brings up the tray with glasses and says good-night of an evening. But her eyes are always about him; and when danger approaches, she is quick to see. Danger comes through another Kirstie, younger sister to

Kirstie's nephews, the Four Black Brothers ; and she is black like them—but comely, and adorned with all the best that a brother's shop in Glasgow can produce. Certainly this time Stevenson showed no fear of a petticoat ; he bestowed much care on the fashion of the girl's adornment when she went to kirk, conscious that for the first time she would see and be seen by the young laird. Everything is planned to make it likely that these two young people, both ripe for love and both without experience of it, should suffer a mortal shock from the first crossing of their glances. And what Stevenson, greatly daring, chooses to depict is the progress of the passion in the young woman's breast. Here is certainly no grossness, but here is physical detail as complete as any that was bestowed on David Balfour's experiences in the heather. The pair's first meeting—not planned but sought by both instinctively—at “the Praying Weaver's stone” in a pass of the hills, has more beauty than I know elsewhere in Stevenson's work ; and it is a beauty clean like the spring wind on the moors. Here is inset a stave of verse with as fine a lyric quality as he ever attained : the snatches of song given to Madge Wildfire in Scott's *Heart of Midlothian* are not better, and perhaps not so exactly fitted to the scene.

Then begin the complications, when Frank Innes, who is to be the very paltry villain of the story, forces himself in on Archie's solitude and begins to make mischief in mere idleness of malice. After a powerful scene in which the elder Kirstie warns her master and entreats with him, Archie goes up to the next tryst, full of “the schoolmaster that is in all men”, and tries his hand at keeping the girl at a distance. So

follow angers, explosions, and we are shown Archie, with the sobbing girl in his arms, looking for the first time on "the ambiguous face of woman as she is".

"He saw not where he had offended. It seemed unprovoked, a wilful convulsion of brute nature. . . ."

And there, on the morning of December 3rd, 1894, Stevenson stopped his dictating, well pleased at last with a book. The afternoon went to writing letters, and before dinner he chaffed his wife about forebodings she had; went to fetch a bottle of old Burgundy, his favourite wine, from the cellar, and was helping her to make a salad when a sudden strangeness came on him; he cried out and dropped. It was all over in a couple of hours. Mr. Lloyd Osbourne has told us how, as he stooped to unlace the boots from the dead body, memory was with him of Stevenson's many times repeated wish—"that I may die in my boots". So much at least was granted. It seems also that he was not denied the sense at last of successful effort; Graham Balfour assures us of this; but there is better proof. He had dedicated perhaps a score of books to different persons, none to his wife. But shortly before his death she found a paper pinned to her dressing-table, a dedication of *Weir of Hermiston* to the one who "Held still the target higher, chary of praise, And prodigal of counsel".

So now, in the end, if this the least be good,  
If any deed be done, if any fire  
Burn in the imperfect page, the praise be thine.

Everything about Stevenson's career has a romantic appeal, but it reached its artistic climax when he died having given proof that power was in him to do as much as he had hoped for himself—as much as we

had hoped for him—and yet leaving himself and us balked of complete fulfilment. There is no use in speculating on might-have-beens; but it is worth noting that complete success in the novel seldom comes to men before maturity, and that when Scott had reached the age at which Stevenson died, he had only written one novel.

Scott, no doubt, is the writer with whom Stevenson has most affinity; yet when I try to place him among writers of our own day, it is of Conrad that I find myself thinking. But critical comparisons too often end by disparaging unduly one man or other; it suffices that none of those who equalled or perhaps excelled him in narrative invention had his range and versatility. Novelist in many kinds, essayist, poet and admirable critic, he was beyond doubt a craftsman who not only gave immense pleasure to readers but rendered high service to his art.



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